

BEADLE'S

HALF DIME Library

Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office.

Copyrighted 1895, by BEADLE AND ADAMS.

February 5, 1895.

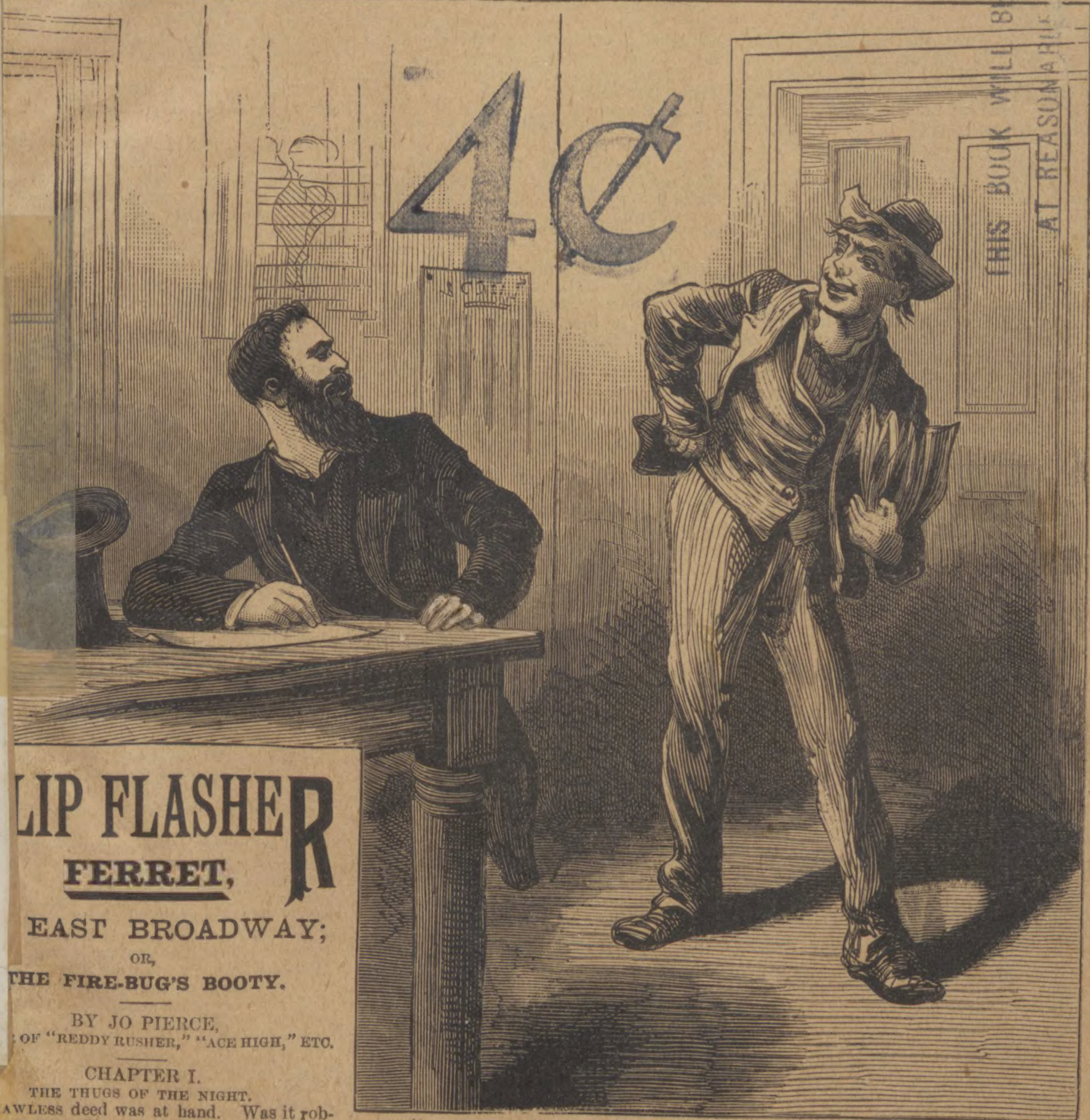
No. 915.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 cents.

Vol. XXXVI



FLIP FLASHER FERRET,

EAST BROADWAY;

OR,

THE FIRE-BUG'S BOOTY.

BY JO PIERCE,

OF "REDDY RUSHER," "ACE HIGH," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE THUGS OF THE NIGHT.

A lawless deed was at hand. Was it robbery, or something worse? The man who looked through the alley and then approached

"SAY, MISTER!" CRIED FLIP. "YOU ADVERTISED FER A LIVE BOY. WAL, HERE HE IS; I'M YOUR PEACH!"

LINCOLN BOOKSTORE

100 N. 4TH ST. PHILADELPHIA, PA.

the rear of the house with such secretiveness surely had no good intention, and in the city of New York there were men who would hesitate at nothing.

He seemed satisfied when he saw that the house was dark and silent, and then he turned and motioned to the point whence he had come. Another man emerged from the alley and joined him.

"All quiet!" whispered the first prowler. "I see nothin' ter prevent our goin' right in as we have planned."

"Then do it without delay. Get a move on!"

They went still closer to the house with its sleeping inmates. Why? What evil act was intended?

At about the same moment two boys met at the corner of East Broadway and Canal street.

"Hello, Shoestrings!" exclaimed one, "how goes it? Biz rushin' an' ev'rybody civil, or has somebody trod on yer uppers so you want me ter go an' lick them dizzy?"

"Nothin' wrong, Flip," was the answer.

"No scraps?"

"Not one."

"Crickey!" was the wondering reply; "how do you manage to exist? Why, sence I seen you I hev licked a grocer's boy an' an Eytalian decayed banana-vender. But, you don't git no fun out o' life, Shoestrings—not an artom!"

"I git some money," was the answer.

"Peddlin' shoestrings! Hum!"

He who had been called Flip looked with some disdain at the big bunch of shoe-laces which hung from his companion's arm. The explanation of this was simple. The second boy was a worker in life, while Flip was a drone. More than that, he rather liked to be a drone, though the fling at his friend was humorous, not really ill-natured or scornful. There were times when his erratic fancy prompted him to boast a good deal of "Shoestrings's" industry.

The two were nearing the point when they were to be of the size of men, but this point was yet some years away, and they were considerably short of their majority in years.

Shoestrings was the smaller of the pair—a slender, sharp-faced youth, while his friend was stouter built.

The real names of the pair were William Flash and Edward Green, but, somebody's fancy had caused these baptismal appellations to be hidden under the nicknames of Flip Flasher and Shoestrings. As such nearly everybody knew them, and they did not object in the least.

In reply to Flip's last fling Shoestrings jingled the coins in his pocket.

"Nickels count!" he tersely remarked.

"So do school-boys."

"You an' me ain't given that way."

"Right ye be, old man! Wal, w'ot is the word?—do we spin along the pave fer awhile, or go home?"

"I want ter go home."

"So you shall, old man; so you shall. I'll escort ye ter your palatial home an' see you safe inside the door."

Flip's humorous fancy led him to try to wind his arm around his companion's waist, but Shoestrings did not see any joke in that; he desired dignity, instead. He freed himself, and then the friends walked on in sober fashion, but talking freely as boys will.

At the entrance to an alley Shoestrings paused.

"Go on!" directed Flip. "I want a match; I want ter light a cig."

"Shoot yer cigs!" snapped Shoestrings.

"I shoot 'em every day—right inter my mouth," grinned Flip, who, much to his companion's disgust, persisted in smoking when he felt like it. This had occasioned many arguments between them.

Shoestrings was not inclined to argue now,

so he entered the alley with Flip at his heels.

"I reckon I'll go inter business life," pursued Flip. "It must be nice ter git home at midnight an' then go ter bed an' dream o' gettin' rich s' fast. Guess I'll buy me a hand-organ an' go out—"

"Guess I'll buy me a stick an' lick you inter— Hello! what's that?"

Shoestrings's gaze had soared upward and he stopped short. Flip looked the same way.

"Crickey!" he cried, "it's a fire!"

It was a fire! They had reached the rear yard, and a row of houses presented their grim backs to them. Nothing had been seen out of the way from the front, but the rear rooms were lighted in a way which conveyed meaning to the street boys at once.

"Is that your ranch?" demanded Flip.

"No, it's Peter Mainford's."

"Wal, Peter's house is on fire, an' ef he don't git a hustle on he will be burned up like a sick cat."

"Wake them up!"

Shoestrings rushed forward to the back door. There was very little prospect of its being unlocked, but he instinctively tried it. It yielded to his touch; it swung back.

"Ginger! that's a queer way ter leave a door at this hour."

"See the smoke!"

It was not hard to see it. The stuff rushed out to meet them in a blinding, irritating cloud. Beyond them was a stairway, and all along its course was the same cloud, reddened in most places by the fire from above.

"Go fer the nearest fire-larm box!" ordered Flip.

"There ain't a sound inside; they must be asleep. Ef we leave them they may be burned ter death. Rush in an' wake them up. Jump to it—go right through the smoke!"

They were about to dare the fire-fiend, when, suddenly a tall figure appeared on the stairs above. With long bounds a man came rushing down. He came out of the smoke like a stage-demon, looking uncanny enough, for he not only had the smoke to make a mantle for him, but his hat was drawn down over his eyes as if to keep the smoke from those useful organs.

"Is that you, Peter?" demanded Shoestrings.

He was almost in the man's tracks, but he did not remain there long. Whether intentionally or not, the stranger leaped right at him, and the result was that the boy was knocked against the wall, from which he tumbled over on the floor.

All this smacked to Flip as very suspicious, and he grasped the unknown man's arm.

"Say, hold up!" he directed. "W'ot is all this racket about? Do you belong here, an'—"

"Take that!"

With this exclamation the man gave Flip a poke in the stomach, and Flip fell over just in time to beat Shoestrings down again with his weight. For a moment the boys squirmed around on the floor, but they finally bounced up. Flip had a pain in his stomach, and he was angry.

"Say, where is the atrocious pirate that jabbed my supper?" he demanded, hotly.

"Let me at him!—let me wipe his nose off the face of the earth!—let me—"

He was feeling around in the smoke and seeking to get his hands on his assailant, but it finally dawned upon him that he was too late.

"The darned old skeesicks is gone!" he lamented.

"Flip, that man didn't belong here!" cried Shoestrings.

"He belonged in Sing Sing, by gum!" asserted Flip.

"Did you see the other clearly?"

"W'ot other?"

"There was two."

"Was there? Then both swiped me in the supper. I thought the biff was too muscular fer one man's doin's."

"The second man carried a box—"

"Say, old man, I'll bet a suspender they was thieves!"

The surmise shot out abruptly, and it was followed by another:

"Yes, an' the folks up above are burnin' ter death. Ter the rescue, old man!"

"The thieves will git clear."

"Shoot the thieves now—we must save the sleepers!"

The force of this reasoning was such that no more was said. Side by side they dashed up the stairs. On the next floor the situation was pretty much the same as below, but Flip's quick eyes told him that all hope of saving the house was not gone. He had located the course of the fire, and saw that it was still confined to small space.

"Yell like a Bowery Injun an' wake them up!" directed the older boy. "I'll water the blaze."

He leaped forward, turned on the water in the sink and seized a convenient pail. Shoestrings obeyed orders to the letter, and his shrill voice sounded the alarm.

"Fire, fire! Where be you, Peter? Git a move on! Fire, fire!"

"That's it!" encouraged Flip. "Spread yer lungs an' fly! Rip the atmospear! Yell some more!"

It was doubtful if Shoestrings heard him, for the latter had not ceased to shout, and the result was soon seen. A man came rushing out of another room, his clothing none too abundant. It was an exciting advent for him, for Flip was beginning to pour water on the flames, and steam as well as smoke floated to the man of the house.

He began to dance up and down.

"Thieves! Murder! Police!" he cried, wildly.

"Shut yer throttle!" advised Flip, coolly. "Git yer engine outer the wet or yer cab will get flooded."

This free-and-easy advice was not clear enough to carry any information, but when the man in white seized a chair and bade fair to make a hostile raid on his companions Shoestrings grasped his arm.

"Peter, don't ye know me?" he demanded.

"Why, it's Ned Green."

"That's a bull's-eye, Peter."

"What's all this row about?"

"Yer house is on fire! Fall to an' help us put the blaze out."

"Yes, an' git a hump on like a camel!" added Flip, flinging another pail of water.

Shoestrings joined in the work, and Peter Mainford was practical enough to give his help without undue delay. The three proceeded to work so lively that the fire was soon subdued.

When it was sure that it was past the danger period Flip stopped short and fixed his gaze upon a point at one side of the room.

"That settles one thing," he declared.

"What?" inquired Peter, coming out of thought.

"Do ye see the pile o' stuff against the wall?"

"What, what? Why, how come that rubbish piled up there?"

"Did you do it?"

"No. Why, it must have been done to set the house on fire—"

"Correct you be, Peter! This here is an incendiary snap, an' you are lucky ter be a citizen of New York instead of an angel."

"Incendiary? But, what could anybody find here to work such a plot for?" and Mainford glanced around his by no means palatial quarters.

"We see them carryin' off a box—"

Mr. Mainford fairly leaped into the air.

"What?" he shouted.

"They had a box—"

Peter began to run around wildly.

"Where is it now?"

"They had it when they went out."
 "Out where?"
 "Out o' the house."
 "Oh, oh! Have they— Did they carry it off? Dcn't tell me they did! Don't tell me that! Where is it?—where is the box?"
 The boys looked hard at the white-clad man as he rushed frantically about the room. Shoestrings had always supposed he was poor, like the rest of those who lived adjacent to the alley, but if the wealth of a millionaire had been at stake Peter could not have been more disturbed.
 "Wish I could comfort ye," answered Shoestrings, "but I guess it's no use. They carried a box off, fer we see them."
 "Why didn't you stop them?" cried Peter.
 "We did, an' they stopped us," coolly returned Flip. "Oh! we was ready enough ter hold 'em up, but they played Sweet Marie on my supper, an' knocked me an' Shoetrings silly, by gum! Then they got off!"
 Peter wrung his hands.
 "I am ruined, ruined!" he asserted, almost weeping.
 "Was there money in that box, boss?"
 "Millions, millions!" groaned Peter. "I am ruined; I will kill myself!" and he caught up a knife.

CHAPTER II.

WORK TO BE DONE.

PETER seemed to mean all he threatened, and the sharp knife was so fully capable of doing the rest that Shoestrings was frightened. He stood mute and still while the knife was swung up, but Flip was made of different stuff.
 He sprung forward, seized Peter's hand, and checked the fall of the weapon. Another movement and he had pinioned the man's arm.
 "Now, you hold hard!" he lightly exclaimed. "Want ter go an' make a mess on the floor that we shall have ter clear up? Folks never hev no consideration fer nobody else when they kill theirselves, an' I say it's mean, by gum! Ef you are bound ter suicide, go out in the yard an' do it."
 This practical speech appeared to take away all desire on Peter's part.
 "Oh, I did not mean to do it!" he declared.
 "You acted like et!"
 "I was crazy."
 "You acted like that, too."
 "I am ruined, ruined!"
 "Say, boss, did you really hev so much money in the box?"
 "It wasn't money—"
 "Then w'ot in thunder was et?" bluntly asked the boy.
 "It was— But maybe my fears are groundless; maybe it was something else they had. I will see."
 He ran into the next room, while Flip shook his head.
 "His trolley is twisted."
 "Yes, he's lost his grip on the cable," agreed Shoestrings.
 Peter came running out, tears running down his cheeks.
 "It's gone!" he announced. "I am a lost man; I am undone; all my hopes are dashed to ruin. I am lost!"
 "Never mind; we will get a lantern an' find you," replied the irrepressible elder boy.
 "W'ot was in the box?" inquired Shoestrings, seriously.
 "I can't tell; I can't tell!" answered Peter, beginning to walk the smoke-laden room wildly.
 "The sum and substance of it all seems ter be there has been a burglary here," added Flip. "Somebody stole somethin' an' then set the house on fire. That's a mighty serious job, an' it means somethin' like twenty

years, I believe, when sleepin' folks are inter the house. We hev got inter a stew, an' the oysters hev skipped the tra-la-la. Now, w'ot shall we do about et?"
 "Go ter the perleece," suggested Shoestrings.
 "Yes, yes; we must do that," agreed Peter. "Oh! my box; my box! This will kill me."
 "Never mind; et ain't so quick as electricity."
 "Electricity!" cried Peter, clasping his hands. "That is just it."
 "W'ot is jest it?"
 "Electricity!"
 "Mister, I ain't onter yer curves fer a red cent."
 "Go for the police; go for them! No; I will go myself. Ned Green, you are an honest boy—stay here until my return."
 He started toward the door.
 "Hold up!" called Flip.
 "What now?"
 "You ain't dressed accordin' ter proper New York style, boss. Nobody on Flfth avenoo would call that orthodox evenin' dress."
 Peter, recalled to his senses in a measure, hurried into his room and came out properly clad. He then proceeded to put his plan in effect, and hastened from the house, leaving the boys in charge.
 "Say, his nibs is all broke up," remarked Flip.
 "So he is."
 "W'ot is all this talk about his havin' treasure? He don't look like a bondholder, by ginger!"
 "I've heerd he was an inventor."
 "Of what—sassage meat?"
 "I don't know what. He lives here all alone with his daughter Bess, an' folks say he's all the time porin' over queer diagrams and other jiggers."
 "Shoestrings, jest you take warnin' from this. Don't you never let jiggers git inter your think-machine."
 "Can't we hev a light here, Flip?"
 "Dunno. There's the gas-fixture."
 "Yes, but," added Shoestrings, as he tried a match, "the gas ain't on. Guess Peter don't burn the stuff. There should be a lamp—Hil here's the pieces of it on the floor—it has been broke."
 "Never mind; here comes Peter, I guess. Yes, it's him."
 A human figure appeared in the gloom.
 "Hey, Petesey!" cried the headlong Flip, "hev you raised the cop?"
 The man stopped short. He had come from the outer air, and ought to have been Peter, it seemed, but both boys were of the opinion that he did not act as Peter would. They tried their best to penetrate the darkness and smoke with their gazes, but failed.
 Flip started forward.
 "Say, Captain Mum, who in blazes be you, anyhow?" he demanded.
 The man remained silent, but, suddenly, he wheeled and began moving off in the direction he had come. Now, Flip was not the boy to let a chance pass by, and he sprung forward and caught at the tail of the stranger's coat.
 "Hold hard, old chap!" was his order.
 The stranger wheeled again and Flip found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver.
 "Die!" growled the unknown.
 "Bluff!" retorted the impetuous boy, not in the least bit alarmed, and with this he leaped upon the intruder's neck.
 "Dump him, Shoestrings!" he shouted.
 "He's our meat!"
 If Shoestrings was less headlong he was not by any means slow, and he sprung to the aid of his friend. Both twined their arms around the stranger and held fast.
 "We've got the fire-bug!" yelled Flip.
 Possibly they had. At any rate, they

seemed to have caught a man unwilling to face them further.
 "Let me go!" he cried, fiercely. "Let me go or it will be the death o' you!"
 It was an ominous warning, but it did not work.
 "Police! Firemen! Peddlers!" shouted the rattle-pated Flip, and he held all the tighter for the threat.
 Then the man began to struggle in earnest. He was a powerful fellow, and when he got in motion he went fast. The boys held on, but they were whirled around like tops, and their limbs knocked together as they made wild evolutions in mid-air.
 "Keep yer grip, Shoestrings!" yelled Flip.
 "This ain't so bad as a windy day in City Hall Park!"
 Just then Shoestrings's hold was broken, and he went banging heavily against the wall. One-half of the burden was off of the man, and he gave Flip a swing which dashed him to the floor.
 "My leg!" screamed the boy. "It's broke!"
 The man stood in irresolution. Shoestrings lay perfectly still, while Flip writhed and groaned in a most dismal fashion. He appeared to be in the direst agony.
 "Good!" muttered the man.
 He turned and hurried off, but his steps still sounded on the stairs when Flip leaped up lightly.
 "Ha, ha!" he laughed. "Fooled ye that time, Old Tough! Say, Shoestrings, be you awake? That gent is one o' the gang, sure as pancakes, an' I am goin' ter foller him ter his lair. Ketch on?"
 Shoestrings lay motionless.
 "Knocked insensible," added Flip, more seriously. "Hope he ain't got no concussion o' the think-tank. Say, Ned, old man, I'm off!"
 Still Shoestrings did not move.
 "You'd better git up an' bathe yer head, Shoestrings; that will resuscitate yer. I can't stop ter do it; I'm off! So-long!"
 With this Flip hurried out of the room and the house. He was firm in the opinion that the man last seen had been a part of the fire-bug gang, and he intended to prove it. He meant to follow him to his headquarters.
 First of all, he made a wild bolt out of the rear yard, and this succeeded so well that he caught sight of his man.
 When this was accomplished Flip's manner underwent a sudden change. With all of his impetuosity, he had plenty of caution and shrewdness when he saw fit to exercise it, and he proved it now.
 His game was rapid in his movements until he was well beyond the alley and the danger of being seen appeared to die away; then he manifested sudden caution, himself. He looked around him, and began a tortuous and stealthy retreat.
 It was greatly to Flip's credit that he was not detected in his pursuit when such care was exhibited, but the boy seemed literally to be gifted with abnormal powers of protection. The instant the man made a motion to look around Flip dodged like a shot into a doorway, and always with such success that all efforts to detect possible pursuit were rendered useless.
 Thus, the chase went on for a long time; but the stranger, after heroic attempts to make himself safe by turning many corners, finally entered a building and it was over.
 Flip chuckled merrily.
 "Old man, I've got ye hived!" was his exultant comment.

CHAPTER III.

A VOLUNTEER DETECTIVE.

FLIP FLASHER stopped and surveyed the scene before him. He had it all to himself. The man whom he had followed was invisible, and nobody else was on the block so far as he could see.

All of his attention was fixed on the building where his quarry had been hived. It was a structure five stories high. The ground floor was used for offices, and the upper part seemed to be dwelling quarters, though he was impressed with the belief that it was not devoted to "flats."

The unknown man had dodged into one of the main doors, but the fact that a light immediately after appeared in an office next to it impressed Flip strongly.

He read the sign over the door.

"Humph!" he muttered, "w'ot does that mean? 'Arizona Land Investment and Colonization Company.' Strikes me et ought ter be the New York Steal an' Burn Company, but mebbe all welds in tergether. So my duck is in there? This is interestin'!"

It was not certain that his late quarry was concerned with the light in the office, but the fact that they had come so near together gave excuse for the suspicion, and Flip was not one to neglect any chance to build theories.

For a long time he stood idle, watching to see if there would be further developments, but, though the light burned on in the office, he saw no human being astir.

Finally he moved closer, and, besides the sign over the door, he saw certain lettering on the window.

"Wonder ef that's the business card o' the fire bug? It reads: 'Addison Oates, Agent for the A. L. I. & C. C.' Et don't say who is agent fer the A. B. C., an' the rest o' the alphabet. The light still glimmers, an' it's dollars ter pancakes that the fire-bug is in there. Wonder if he has Peter's gold an' silver under his beamin' eyes?"

Flip moved close to the window, but he found no opening where he could gain view of the interior. The chances of fresh discoveries were so few that he decided to hasten back to the alley and see if things were not more lively there.

He went. On arriving at the entrance to the alley, he found Shoestrings waiting for him.

"Hi, there, you don't say!" cried Flip.

"Don't say w'ot?" asked the younger boy.

"That you are alive."

"Of course I be."

"But you was dead when I left ye."

"Ef you think I be now, jest you put up your hands!" retorted Shoestrings, warmly. "Great lad, you be, ter run off an' shake a feller as you did."

"Duty, my friend; duty!"

"Clear case o' flunk."

"Wal, never mind; we kin fight it out some time," good-humoredly answered Flip.

"How's things?"

"The police has been inter Peter's."

"Course they hev."

"They didn't ketch nobody."

"Course they didn't. Didn't expect they would, did ye? Why, you an' me scared them so they are a clear hundred miles off now. The last I seen o' them they was in Jersey, and going over the Hackensack meadows so fast that electric lights flamed out all around their coat-tails."

"Say," cried Shoestrings, "that reminds me. Et was that which Peter had stole."

"W'ot? His coat-tails?"

"No, somethin' about electricity. You know I told you he was an inventor. Wal, that box we seen had in it the model fer the biz—a new apparatus fer lightin' streets."

"I don't fully grasp it. Let me irrigate my think-factory."

Flip pulled one of his ears three times viciously, and then added:

"Proceed! My trolley will ketch et, now."

"Peter's new invention will light up the streets so nigh will be jest like day. A wire with electric jets will run along the eaves of every house, an' there won't be a dark spot in no street whatever, it will light things so fine."

"Accordin' ter Peter's notion."

"Oh! but this is not a fake. Peter had showed the invention ter two business houses. One of them offered him fifty thousand dollars fer it, but he wanted more. Anyhow, it means a loss o' fifty thousand, an' Peter is desperate."

Flip thrust his hands into his pocket deeply.

"Fifty thousand!" he murmured, slowly.

"Peter hadn't got et patented, but the model was in that box. He says he can't make another one like it in less than five years, an' w'ot he is most afraid of is that the thieves will go an' get it patented ahead o' him. He's jest crazy over it."

"Fifty thousand!" again muttered Flip.

"Yes."

"Say, w'ot will Petey give fer it back?"

"He said he would give five thousand dollars."

"Hi! did he? Was the cops around?"

"Yes."

"Did they say they knew jest where ter look fer the crooks?"

"No."

Flip took his friend by the most convenient button and led him to one side. Then, looking around with the greatest caution, he added in a husky whisper:

"Shoestrings, you an' me will nail that boodle?"

"Hey! what's that?"

"No jokin', my boy. I ain't a man ter joke!" added Flip, with great dignity. "Now, the long an' short of it is, we must turn electric detectives an' win that five thousand."

"How can we?"

"Find the box an' the stealers. Work! Hunt! Hustle! Git a canter on an' fairly make New York shake."

Shoestrings shook his head.

"I kin sell shoe-laces," he answered, "but this ain't in my line."

"Wal, by ginger! it's in mine, an' I am goin' ter prove it. Out I go, ter-morrer, an' you will see my hair wavin' like banners I'll go so fast. I am going ter blossom out in a way that will astonish East Broadway. What's more, you are goin' ter help me!"

The younger boy brightened up perceptibly.

"I'll do et all the time I get away from peddlin' shoe-laces."

"Shoot yer shoe-strings! W'ot do they count against glory? But then, old man, I know you will fall inter line when the band begins ter play, for you are a reg'lar peach. I'll let ye know the ways an' means later on."

The boys conversed for a considerable time, and Flip learned all he could about the case. Then they separated for the night. Both went home, but it was with the understanding that they should meet at Pete's the next morning, and they kept their promise.

When they arrived two police officers were on the scene, and they were questioned a good deal. They told all they knew conjointly, but Flip kept back the fact that he had followed one of the supposed fire-bugs to his lair. He was human enough to wish to work that lead all by himself.

Mainford explained his situation more fully.

"My invention was a plan to light the city by electricity in a way very different from that now in use," he remarked. "At present some sections have no electric-lights, and where such light is used there are alternate patches of bright light and semi-darkness."

"Now, by my plan the electric-works would run along the eaves of every building in the city, and light-jets would not be over five feet apart. Being so close together they would not need to be so big, glaring and dazzling as they now are."

"By my plan, too, every nook and corner would be lighted well and alike, but I have

a secret by which the light can be made mellow and pleasant to all who see it.

"I have been in consultation with several companies, and all have offered me big money for the rights. Oh! that I had got it patented at the start—but I couldn't, because I was so poor. Now, the model is stolen, and if the thief gets it patented ahead of me I am ruined. Oh! dear, oh! dear, what an awful misfortune!"

The police encouraged him all they could. Flip said nothing, but he continued to think. When he was dismissed he and Shoestrings went out. The latter had his laces over his arm, and was more anxious to go about his business than to engage in idle wandering.

His friend advised him to go, and then Flip walked over to the office of the Arizona Land Company. He noticed a piece of paper pasted on the window which had not been there before, and he went close and read it:

"A LIVE BOY WANTED!"

Flip chuckled.

"That's jest my weight. I'll go in. I'll see w'ot is wanted, an' then I'll see w'ot else is ter be seen. Old man, you are jest about in luck. Here goes—"

Just then a newsboy approached. Flip had a sudden idea, and as he had a little money in his pocket he proceeded to buy the entire stock of his companion. This done he sent the latter about his business and then turned his face toward the office again.

"Now ter beard the fire-bug in his den!" he muttered.

CHAPTER IV.

FLIP GOES INTO BUSINESS.

MOST persons would have been sobered by the crisis so near at hand, but this was not the case with Flip Flasher. There was no such thing as subduing him, and he clasped the package of papers under his arm and went ahead with all of the confidence and good humor imaginable.

Opening the office door he walked serenely in.

The Arizona Land Company evidently did not believe in wasting money in idle display, and the office was not over-furnished, but it was all well enough and comfortable. The main thing was a table, and at this a man was seated, engaged in writing, his hat resting on the table near him.

He turned as the door creaked, and Flip caught sight of a face the most distinctive feature of which was a big black beard. It owner looked at Flip, and the latter threw himself into an attitude, and allowed the old good-humored grin to appear on his face.

He was a striking figure in his way, and a half-smile came to the man's face, though Flip's papers must have deceived him as to the object of the call.

"Say, mister!" cried Flip, "you advertised fer a live boy. Wal, here he is! I'm your peach!"

"You!" returned the man, doubtfully, eying him sharply.

"Nobody else."

"You are a newsboy—a street Arab!"

"Bet yer life! There ain't nobody on East Broadway who kin give me p'inters. Here's the papes—ef you want ter buy we will work the news-agency first, but don't you forgit that I am the live boy you want. That's the main biz o' the hour."

Now, if Flip had but known it, he was about as far from being the ideal of a boy who would fill an office position as anybody could be. He wore ill-fitting clothes; he was not so clean of person as he might have been, and his language was not in the least elegant.

Happily unconscious of these defects, he awaited the answer with confidence, and it was surprising that the man did not show signs of rebuffing him.

"I will talk with you," he replied. "Sit down!"

"Hain't I better lock the door?"

"Why?"

"How long has that sign, 'Boy wanted,' been up?"

"Possibly fifteen minutes."

"Inside an hour we shall all of East Broadway and most o' the side-streets here fer the posish. We shall hev ter lock them out or we shall not hev any peace."

"I think we are safe," replied the man, smiling. "Sit down."

Flip obeyed, but he did not allow modesty to keep him silent.

"Be you Addison Oates?" he bluntly asked.

"Yes."

"Doin' a land biz, be you?"

"Yes."

"Does it pay?"

"I can't complain."

"Need a boy, do ye?"

"Yes."

"Wal, then fire away. You want a live boy, an' that's the sort of a chicken I be. Ef I'm dead I don't know it. See?"

Flip was as free-and-easy and confident as ever. He had sat down, elevated his feet, and was taking life easy with a vengeance. It did not occur to him that he might be ruining his chances for a position, but, singularly enough, Mr. Addison Oates did not resent the forward manner of his visitor.

There was something almost like approval in his own aspect.

"What is your name?" he inquired.

"Flip Flasher."

"That's an odd name."

"It's Russian. I'm a subject of the czar."

"Do you live near here?"

"Yes, ef I find a box that nobody else ain't got inter ahead of me."

"Luck goes hard with you, does it?"

"Not at all. Sometimes I don't get enough ter eat, but that's all. They won't let me inter the Newsboy's Home because my feet are too big."

"Well, can you be honest, industrious and faithful?"

"I kin, fer cash."

Mr. Oates leaned back in his chair with a business air.

"I run a Land Investment and Colonization Company," he explained, "and I get settlers and speculators here in New York. Sometimes I start a hundred of them off in a day to settle on the boundless plains and in the rich valleys of Arizona."

Flip was not well informed on the Western Territories, but what he had heard of Arizona had led him to look upon that place as a medley of barren mountains and sandy deserts. He did not care for that now, and he cheerfully interjected:

"Good fer you, boss!"

"Back of me are a full dozen of wealthy philanthropists who seek to do good to the poor and worthy, but in my office I have only one associate, a Mr. Charles Martin. He is my collector. Now, I need a boy to run errands, too."

"A live boy?"

"Yes."

"I am the cadaverous fat man you need. I never did take ter sellin' papes, though I hev been in the bez ever sence I was six months old. Now, I would like ter retire. W'ot is the cash inter this, boss?"

"How about ten dollars a week?"

Flip studied the matter for some time, and then seriously replied:

"I'll do ef you'll give me five per cent. royalty. Peeksy Neal has got a brother who wrote a thater-play an' he gets that."

Amiable Mr. Oates smiled again and proceeded to explain that his business differed greatly from that of a theater, and that the per cent. would have to be barred, but the offer of ten dollars a week was open to Flip.

Flip accepted it. He was wily, and did not show undue zeal, but when he had asked good many more questions he accepted with grave decision.

"You will begin at once," then added Oates. "Here is something to do as a starter. Carry this letter to its destination when I have finished it. Take this half-dollar as pay for your papers and pitch them in to the waste-basket."

Oates turned to his writing and moved his pen rapidly for a few minutes. The letter completed, he sealed it in an envelope and gave it to his new employee.

"Carry it at once, and then return to me. I may not have many errands, to-day, but I want you on the premises."

Flip did the errand, which was to deliver the note to a store, and then returned. He found two foreigners in the office—Bohemians, he thought—and Oates, who soon proved to have command of various languages, was telling them of the fine homes to be had in Valley Rest, Arizona.

Flip had not come there impressed in favor of Mr. Oates, and being anxious to find flaws in him, he soon arrived at a decision as to the Land Company.

"Black Beard is tryin' ter skin them," was his unspoken verdict. "Wants them ter put up a little cash an' go inter the scheme, does he? Wal, so do all crooks want that same. That's w'ot the Land Co. is."

Several times during this conversation Oates had glanced at Flip as if not wholly satisfied to have him present, and he had no sooner disposed of his would-be colonists than he touched a bell. A colored man came from a door at the rear of the office.

"Boy," spoke Oates, "you will go with this man and see your new quarters. Remain with him after that—when I want you I will ring for you. Understand?"

"Sure," Flip answered.

He was somewhat surprised that an office-boy should be sent up-stairs, but he was not disposed to remonstrate. He followed the colored man and tried to draw him into conversation as they went, but the man was not talkative, and confined his replies to monosyllables.

The new office-boy was conducted to a room where two women sat sewing. They were dressed neatly but plainly, and had a wholesome look, on the whole, but Flip was not sure he was going to like them. One was gray-haired, while the other could not have been over twenty-five years of age.

The colored man nodded brusquely.

"This is the boy," he announced.

"Yes, ladies," agreed Flip, "I am the boy. I never should pass fer a centenarian."

He smiled as he said it, but his good humor did not seem catching. The older woman told him to sit down, and he did so. Then there was a pause which was not pleasant to him. He wanted life and excitement, not to sit in idleness with two women. He meditated, and then put on his broadest smile.

"Be you colonizers, too?" he inquired.

"Whom do you address?" stiffly asked the elder woman.

"I dunno. W'ot is yer name?"

"What is that to you?"

"Nothin'; only I want ter be chummy. I've been legally adopted by Brother Oates, an' I want ter do my part with the happy family. Let's be sociable. Do we shake an' make up?"

CHAPTER V. THE RANCHMAN.

FLIP felt that his urbanity ought to be met with warmth, but it was not. Friendly as he was, his companions did not rush to welcome him. On the contrary, he hardly received any reply, and, when further efforts met with the same poor luck, he relapsed into silence.

The few remarks made by his new associates in the next few minutes gave him their names, however. The old woman was Susan, the younger one was Violet, and the negro rejoiced in the handle of Tim Flynn—a name very unusual for a colored man.

Perhaps half an hour had passed when there was a knock at the door. This did not seem to be a singular matter, but Flip was at once impressed with the manner of his companions.

Everything was suspended, and they looked at each other in a queer way.

"Scared!" thought the quick-witted Flip. Susan turned her gaze suddenly upon Flip.

"It's our minister," she announced, rapidly. "Boy, go inter the next room yonder."

"I'd kinder like ter meet the minister—" "Go!"

"Yes'm."

Flip started, but he was not soon enough. They had delayed about opening the door, and the man who was there evidently had become impatient. The door opened without more ceremony, and somebody walked in.

The street-boy, keen of observation, quickly arrived at a decision.

"He ain't no New Yorker!"

It was plain in the dress and the sun-burn seen on the stranger, but the latter allowed but little time for idle survey. He moved quickly to the middle of the room and there came to a halt. He seemed to look for something not visible—then he demanded quickly:

"What have you done with her?"

Violet was not confused by the abrupt question, for she coolly but sharply retorted:

"What have you lost—a growler?"

The intruder appeared mystified.

"A growler—what is that? But it don't matter. Where is my girl?"

"On the Island, I reckon!" returned Violet, with easy assurance.

"What island?"

"Oh! say, come out of the backwoods and get a move on you! If you are as green as you claim, do go and eat hay for awhile."

"Abuse will not turn me away!" angrily declared the man. "You know me; I am Dave Starling. I am lookin' fer my Nell."

"We don't care a rap what you're looking for. You can't come around here with any more of your guff. We've seen you once before, and we know your way. Now, you get—"

Susan had been looking uneasily at Flip, and she now went close to Violet's side and whispered to her. Violet turned angrily upon Flip.

"Say, didn't you get your orders?" she cried.

"Not yet, mum," serenely replied the boy. "I am on the anxious seat fer orders."

"Don't you worry about that. Get into that room, and go quick."

"All right, mum."

Flip had never been meeker, and he turned to obey without delay. He passed into the room directed, and, at a motion from Violet, the negro closed the door.

"Sorter got the buncol!" murmured the boy. "W'ot do I care? I brought my ears along with me, an' by gum! I kin use them. I sorter want ter git inter their curves. W'ot is eatin' that sole-leather skin gent, anyhow?"

Anxious to learn something on this point the boy applied his ear to the keyhole, and found he could still hear without trouble. Dave Starling was doing the talking.

"I want you to explain this," he asserted.

"There is nothing to explain," answered Violet.

"Where is Nell?"
 "We don't know."
 "You told me she was up at Tarrytown."
 "Then why don't you go there?"
 "I have, but I cannot find her."
 "That does not concern us. We are not her keepers. If she has flown the coop it isn't our funeral."
 "Durn et all!" cried Starling, with sudden change of manner. "I don't trust you folks any too much. I believe you are playin' me false. The trip to Tarrytown was a bogus job, I reckon, an' I'm none the wiser. I want ter find my gal."
 "Go and do it, then!"
 "Now, you see here!" cried the visitor, almost shouting. "I don't want no more impudence out o' you. No, an' I won't hev it! You lured my gal away from the ranch in Nebraska, an' now you hide her when I come, so that I—"

"Steady! Prove that we have hidden her!"
 "Wal, as ter that, I dunno as I kin prove et—"

"Then pull in your tongue!" snapped Violet, with true East Side flippancy. There was a lull, but it seemed that the tempest was only gathering afresh. When Starling next spoke his manner was much quieter, but it was full of subdued intensity.

"I've heerd a good deal about the thugs o' New York, an' it seems I've run up ag'inst a gang o' them. Don't you get away with the notion that I'm ter be led around by the nose jest because my experience has been on a western ranch—not by a durned sight! I may not be a city sharp, but I am a man, an' capable of fightin' any two-legged critter in your outfit. D'ye see?"

Flip chuckled.
 "Mister," he muttered, under his breath, "I don't know who you be, but you sorter fill my notion of a man. I wish I could sing out an' make ye hold ter yer cable."

The resolute stand of the ranchman led Violet to adopt a less aggressive manner, and as they lowered their voices enough to make it hard for Flip to overhear what they were saying, he bethought himself of his own errand.

"Wonder where that box is?"
 Flip had no proof that any box had come into the building, but he was tenacious of his opinions, and one of them was that Addison Gates had the box stolen from Mainford. If it was not not in the building it was elsewhere, but he inclined to the belief that it was right there.
 "I never shall git a better chance ter look, an' I'll hustle while I kin."

The premises occupied by Oates and his allies had about the same arrangement as a flat, and Flip proceeded to reconnoiter without being under anybody's eyes.

"I don't think the box is in the office ner the room where Davey is arguin' Nebraska ellquence, so et must be here. Git a move on an' show yerself."

He hastened forward and looked his sharpest, but not a sign did he discover of the box in the first room. He kept on, running about like a hunting-dog on the trail. Much to his chagrin he saw only furniture, and not very much of that.

At last he brought up at the rear of the building.

"Done up, by gum!" he admitted. "Ef it's in here the blamed thing is well hid. I don't think it is in here, but I don't weaken fer a cent on my theory that Ad Oates has it somewhere. I wonder where?"

Twisting his face humorously Flip was about to give further notice to his conundrum when he heard unexpected sounds from the front rooms.

"Crickey! what is that?" he cried. "They have started a circus, et seems, an' I reckon Davey is the clown. Back, old man, or there will be a snag fer you."

Running to the door next to the room where he had left his companions he opened it a little and saw a lively struggle going on. The colored man and Dave Starling had grappled, and Violet and Susan were doing their best to help Tim. All, in fact, were striking Dave, and pulling and hauling at him in a way which bade fair soon to rend his clothes to pieces, if he escaped a like fate.

There was no joke about this, and no rough-and-tumble quarrel of the ordinary kind. Flip read his associates well, and he knew Starling really was in danger.

"Crickey! I kin jest about fit in there!" muttered the boy. "Here goes. Let the back streets be heard from!"

A few light leaps took him to the vicinity of the struggling mass; then his hands were added to the bunch that pulled and clawed so venomously.

He was not at first noticed.
 "Kill him!" panted Violet, whose breath seemed to grow short.

"That's the figger!" exclaimed Flip. "Bu'st his snoot! Hammer him silly! Brooze his eyebrows!"

There was a twinkle in the speaker's eyes as he spoke these sanguinary words. He had decided on his own plan of action, and it was to pretend to be in full sympathy with the gang, even while helping Dave all he could.

Elaborate as the scheme was it lacked a good deal of being simple, for the rapid movements of the party baffled clear action, and about all Flip was sure of was that he was getting a share of the blows. Thump, thump, thump, thump! fell fists on his head and body.

"It's the prettiest scrap out!" cried Flip, gayly.

CHAPTER VI.

FLIP KEEPS ON TOP.

If the East Broadway boy had been a tender plant he would soon have tired of the role he had assumed, for he was getting hit by all parties by accident; but he did not care for this—street life had toughened him until he cared little for blows.

Ignoring his own hurts, he persisted in seeking to ward off the blows aimed at Starling, but doing it with great cunning.

Starling was not making the fight to be expected of one of his athletic build, and Flip suspected that he had been injured by a well-directed blow. He was resisting feebly, and his aid began to be worried about him. Even if he had been able to give his help boldly, it would have looked like a losing fight for Dave.

The negro soon showed that he was a thorough desperado. Flip saw his hand go into his pocket, and then come out clasping a knife. He swung the blade up over Starling, and the boy knew he must stop that stroke in some way.

Flip's wits did not fail him.
 He suddenly staggered against the negro so heavily that Tim lost his feet and tumbled over. Flip promptly fell with him, and both sprawled on the floor.

The negro was not especially agile, and before he could rise Flip had bounded up like a rubber ball. Nothing could keep him down.

Starling had sunk into a chair, and his dull eyes and generally demoralized air were noticeable. His wily friend felt that he must make a diversion to save both Dave and himself.

He squared himself off before Dave and spoke with a show of excitement.

"Stay right where you be, old man! Don't ye try ter git out o' that chair or I will hammer you fer keeps. You miserable old chump, w'ot do ye mean by comin' inter this private mansion an' kicking up a row. Jest you set still or I'll thump ye. See?"

Flip swung his arms like a pugilist, and really looked decidedly fierce. Dave was

not in condition to object, and Flip had it all his own way. The boy stole a look at the gang, and saw that they did not seem to suspect his double dealing.

Tim rose slowly and in a careful manner, as if not sure that his arms and legs were sound. He picked up his knife, but did not make any move to use it again.

"I've got him!" added Flip. "Come an' finish the job. Wait! did I hear somebody at the door?"

He inclined his head, and all listened for a moment. Then the boy spoke in a whisper.

"Hold on a bit an' they will pass by, I reckon."

He had not heard anybody at the door, but he was playing his part well to give Dave time. If the ranchman once regained his strength and mental ability, there was, he thought, no danger of violence being done.

"My head is most broke!" lamented Susan, suddenly.

"Do somethin' fer it!" urged Flip. "Don't neglect it, mum. Get a wet cloth an' have it bandaged, quick!"

"Bother the hurt!" snapped Violet; "we want to do this gent first!" and she nodded toward Dave.

"Trow him out o' the winder!" suggested Flip.

Starling abruptly raised his head.
 "You will come ter grief if you try it!" he declared.

"Oh! don't you git sassy!" warned Flip. "Gimme the knife, Tim, an' let's settle this. Keep still, you wild Western wonder!—no monkey biz here, by gum! Be we ter do him up?"

Tim looked at Violet, but she shook her head decidedly.

"No violence, men! We were forced into this fight, and the knife was drawn under severe temptation. We are law-abiding citizens—"

"Right you be!" echoed Flip. "No lawlessness ain't our size, but we hev ter defend our lives from Western toughs. See?"

He winked slyly to Violet, and conducted himself with a swagger which went far toward giving him standing with his employers. In fact, the boy's assumption of wickedness when he was all the while so anxious to aid Dave had been capital acting, and the whole pretense a great success.

Starling suddenly rose.

"Ef ycu want more o' me you kin get it!" he sturdily declared. "Et is fer you ter take yer pick. Do you object ter my goin' out?"

He moved toward the door.

"Object!" cried Violet, with scorn. "What do you take us for? Do you think you are a man big enough to interest us? All we want is for you to keep where you belong."

"You want ter bluff me out o' findin' my gal."

"Bother your girl! We know nothing of her—"

"I say you have her in your power, somewhere."

"Rubbish!"

"You lured her away, and you broke up my home. Now, jest return her an' I won't make no fight. I won't go ter the police; I'll go right back West an' never be seen here no more. Only give me my gal! Do it, an' I'll bless you. Won't you give me my Nell?"

The fighting spirit had died out of the ranchman's mind, and he nearly broke down wholly. His voice trembled pitifully, and tears stood in his eyes.

His nature was simple, and like that of a child compared with that of the world-wise Violet. Flip saw that the young woman was quick to take advantage of the mood.

"My good man," she answered, "you are all at sea. We haven't got your Nell; we don't know anything about her. Tarrytown was a myth."

"She went off with you—"

"Only for a few hours."

"What then?—what then?"

"Left me, saying she was going back to Nebraska. I guess she is there now."

Starling was silent. His opinions were a trifle shaken, but they were too exact to be given up without evidence.

"You've said all this before," he replied, with a sigh. "But it don't bring my gal back."

"Not to you, though it may bring her to Nebraska."

"Maybe, maybe! Wal, I ain't makin' no advance here, so I will go an' look fer her elsewhere. I hope I shall find her."

His lip trembled, and Flip was deeply moved with fellow-feeling. He had not yet obtained the clue to the trouble between the two parties, but he well knew where his sympathies lay. He believed Starling to be a worthy man, and was quite sure the others were as bad as men and women were made.

To the last remark Violet flippantly retorted:

"Better go and look, then."

"I will."

The ranchman had been moving toward the door. He now paused near it and looked at his companions. There was enmity expressed there, and it was plain he did not take any stock in their denials.

"I'll go," he added, "an' when I find her I'll let you know. You shall hear from me again."

Flip was expecting a new outbreak, but the gang appeared to be worried by what had gone before, and they allowed Starling to go his way. He passed the door; his steps sounded on the stairs, and they were minus his presence.

The trio remained in mute meditation, but Flip did not let any time go to waste. In his airiest way he exclaimed:

"Wal, that 'way-back has got a giant gall. W'ot biz has he ter git gay an' sass us New Yorkers?"

Violet turned sharply upon the speaker.

"What do you know about this?" she demanded.

"I know he smashed me until I'm black an' blue."

"Do you know the man?"

"Me? Know a sage-hen from the howlin' plains?—an' me a New Yorker? Mum, you mean wal, I've no doubt, but you hurt my feelin's. Do I know him? No, siree; I do not!"

"What do you think of our trouble?"

"Hey! but wasn't it a jim-hickey scrap?" cried Flip, with enthusiasm.

"I mean, do you know what the difficulty was?"

"No. What was it?" bluntly asked the boy.

"You are too inquisitive. I don't know whether to trust you or not."

"He fought well fer us," reminded Susan.

"So he did," put in Tim. "He nigh about saved my life."

Violet was the most intelligent of the trio. Consequently she was the least inclined to accept Flip as a trustworthy member of the party, but she was influenced by this chorus. Like the others, she had failed to detect any double dealing in the boy's method of fighting, and she began to lose her doubts.

"That man," she explained, "is a hayseed from the West who is trying to make a muss for us. Don't give any heed to what he says."

"Crickey! I knew he was a chump the minute I set eyes on him. The only mistake we made was not ter do him up. Why, I advised it then. Ef you had took my advice, we wouldn't hev left a vest button of him ter tell the story. I tell yer what, these hayseeders must be took down!"

Flip waved his hand wildly in his pretense of earnestness, but, just then, they were interrupted as the door again unclosed. A

man walked in, and Flip could hardly avoid a start of uneasiness.

The new-comer was no stranger.

"Hey!" he thought, excitedly, "that's the galoot I follered from the alley ter this dive, last night! I'm hot inter it!"

CHAPTER VII.

FLIP IS ACCUSED.

THE man who had just arrived was not a prepossessing looking fellow. He was squat of form and red of face, and there was a general air of evil propensities about him not likely to enlist decent people as his friends.

Flip could not swear to the face, but the figure was so much like that of the man he had followed that he felt sure of his position. He was not pleased with the discovery; he wished the man had kept away.

The stranger paused at sight of Flip, but Violet broke the silence quickly.

"Martin, I'm glad you've come," she averred.

Martin looked at her.

"Why?"

"We have had trouble here—"

"I suspected it. He is a spy."

"Who?"

Martin leveled a fat finger.

"This boy."

It was Flip who was thus accused, but he kept up his courage. He was getting accustomed to difficulties. Deliberately he turned and looked toward the rear, and then, again turning, fixed a puzzled gaze on Martin.

"There ain't nobody here," he remarked.

"Ain't you here?"

"No, I'm over in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. Ha, ha! Excuse me fer jokin', mister; I meant no harm. Yes, I'm here, but I don't see the spy."

"You are him."

"I'm a—what?"

"I say you are a spy."

"Oh, Hannah Q. Jones, w'ot are you givin' of us? Spy fer w'ot? Whose little spy be I? Mister, shuffle the cards over an' let us have a deal with the checker-board side up."

Flip was as light-hearted and cheerful as ever, but he was ignored. Mr. Martin turned to Violet.

"Is this the new boy?"

"Yes."

"He is a spy."

"Say, you make me weary," said Flip. "You ought ter hev a tip on yer teeth, an' that means you talk too much. I don't know the meanin' o' this, an' I guess you don't; if you do, spit it out. Start up the fire-works!"

"Do you know a house which has an entrance on an alley as well as on the street?" sharply asked Martin.

Flip could not fail to see that Peter Mainford's house was meant, but this did not worry him in the least. His old rollicking smile was on his face.

"That's Mike Culver's saloon. Know it? Why, my Uncle Dan rushes the growler that way every night—"

"Shut up!"

"All right," cheerfully replied Flip.

"Do you mean to say you are not the boy I saw last night?"

"Can't say as to that, fer I don't know where you was; but I don't know you. I guess I'm not the hairpin you hev in mind, mister."

"There was a fire," suggestively remarked Martin.

Flip shook his head.

"I didn't attend no fire last night," he asserted.

"Boy, I don't believe you!" declared Martin, suddenly. "This thing must be sifted; I want to know who you are."

"I ain't no card with me—"

"Until I am sure you are all right I will put you under a trifle of restraint. Now, here is a rope. I will put it onto you and tie you up."

"Capital idea," agreed Flip. "It will jest about fit me. Kin you tie a sailor's knot, mister? Ef you can't I'll show you. That sort o' knot will jest about keep me from breakin' away."

Martin stopped short.

"You are a cool one!" he exclaimed. "Either you are innocent, or your nerve sticks out further than a dude's collar. Still, ef it is nerve, it shows you are dangerous, an' I'll tie you up."

He advanced, but at that moment a voice sounded at the door.

"Stop!"

Addison Oates walked into the room.

"Put away the rope," he directed. "I am not going to have my men used that way."

"But the boy is a spy," remonstrated Martin.

"Prove it!"

"I think I saw him last night at—"

"Yes, yes; I know. Can you swear to that?"

"No."

"Then don't be so fast to worry my employees. From my point of view your suspicion is ridiculous. The boy is an honest boy, and one of the noble, bright youth of this section."

"That is a fact!" interrupted Flip, not too modestly.

"He is not to be troubled under mere suspicion."

"Send fer Dick," quickly requested Martin. "He had a much better look at them than I did—he will be able to say positively whether it is the boy I think."

"Tim," ordered Oates, "go for Dick. Hump yourself!"

"I'm off, sah."

The negro hurried away on his errand, while all the others sat down. Flip followed the general example, and was, outwardly, as cool as anybody else; but he was not so well satisfied as he seemed. According to statements a man was coming who could identify him beyond question, and it looked as if the boy was going to have serious trouble.

"Guess I'll git slashed up," he thought. "They will prove me ter be a giddy fraud, an' then off will go my head. I don't like the gleam in their bonny blue eyes—they had as soon do a feller up as not. Anyhow, I've got a pointer on them: they hev jest as good as confessed that they was in the alley last night. Flip, my boy, you are on the trail, with bugles blowin'. The only drawback is that you may hev yer own funeral before you score yer victory."

"It was a melancholy prediction, but he did not let it disturb his outward serenity. He smiled the old, happy-go lucky smile and talked his full share. He saw that Martin was the only one inclined to doubt him, and he set himself to work to increase the good opinion that the others held of him.

If he escaped the exposure which threatened him he wanted to be fully in the swim later on.

"Shoot that Dick!" he meditated. "Ef he comes an' gives me away I will make East Broadway howl fer this, by gum!"

It was a period of uneasy waiting, but Black Tim finally drifted in again, and he came along.

"Where's Dick?" asked Oates.

"He wa'n't in."

"Where was he?"

"I reckon he was out on our private biz, by w'ot I saw," replied Tim, with an air of secrecy.

Oates turned his gaze upon Flip. He seemed to study the boy keenly, but Flip had never been more at ease in appearance. Suddenly the black-whiskered gentleman spoke.

"Come to the office. I have a dozen letters I want you to deliver in person, and it is time to do it."

"Where?" inquired Martin abruptly.

"All over."
"Are you goin' ter send this kid out on the street, alone?"
"Yes."

"Then you will do a mighty rash thing—"
"Oh, bother! Come, boy!"
Oates turned toward the office, and Flip followed. At the door he turned to say, meekly, to Mr. Martin:

"Boss, please don't be too rough on a poor orfin whose parents is dead. In the end you will find I am a chicken without a pin-feather on me. Wait an' see."

Martin glowered darkly, but as he said nothing the argument was not continued. Flip went with Oates to the office and received the letters.

"All are duly addressed," explained he of the black-whiskers, "and you have only to go and deliver them. When it is done, if you want a short time off to play with your mates, take it. Return here without too much delay, though."

"Thankee, sir," humbly answered Flip.
"Another thing—don't mind Moon Martin. He's cranky at times."

Flip pulled his lip down until his face looked long and woe-begone, wiped his eyes and replied:

"He hurt my feelin's, Martin did."
"Don't mind him. Now, be off and do the errands."

Flip went. His tender feelings were not so seriously "hurt" but that he recovered when on the street. He chuckled and winked at vacancy as if highly amused.

"Say, but I've had more fun than a goat!" he declared, "Yes, an' ef I ain't lost my grip on the cable the cars are runnin' right on, ter land this outfit o' sharks inter Sing Sing. Go ahead, Flip, my boy: I'll back ye up every time!"

Examination of the letters showed that they were addressed to men with names that smacked strongly of Polish and Russian nationality, and Flip did not doubt that they were some of Oates's victims. It appeared to be to the boy's interests to deliver them in due form, and he was hastening along with this object in view when he suddenly noticed a familiar figure just ahead.

"Hullo, there's Shoestrings, sure as I live! He's peddlin' them everlastin' laces as glib as ever. I wonder—"

Flip paused, looked around with an air little less than wild, and then swooped down upon Shoestrings in a way which startled his more easy-going friend. Shoestrings, unconscious of his proximity, was suddenly seized in Flip's tenacious hold, and then the latter thrust the letters into Shoestrings's hands.

"Say, take them an' deliver them where they're directed ter. See? Don't miss doin' it. So-long!"

With this Flip rushed rapidly off, leaving amazed Shoestrings gazing at him in blank wonder.

"I guess he's gone crazy!" muttered Shoestrings.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CRY FOR HELP.

FLIP had not gone crazy; there was abundant method in his course, even if it was eccentric. His excitement was caused by sight of a man he knew. This man had dawned upon his vision suddenly, and stirred the street boy into new desires.

The man was Moon Martin, and he was proceeding along the street with a companion bound on some business to Flip unknown.

"I wonder ef the other man is the Dick that Moon was so anxious should see me?" thought the pursuer. "He is somebody, an' why ain't the chance good that he is that same Dick? I'll see where they go."

It was not difficult to follow them success-

fully. They did not appear to fear pursuit, and their straightforward course made Flip's task easy.

Several blocks were traversed, and then they paused briefly in front of a big, rambling old building. It was no strange place to the watcher. He had been there himself in the past. He knew the structure had been put up as a tenement-house, but that parts of it had been given up to business and human beings were mixed in together without much regard for system.

Moon and his companion entered.
"Wot be they in there fer?" muttered Flip. "I'd like ter know, an' by crickey! I will. Here goes!"

Close to where they had entered was a small room used as an office. Into this place he hurried. A dull-looking man sat smoking a black pipe.

"Hullo, Gus!" cried Flip.
"Hullo, boy. Vas dot you?"

"No, et's my brother. But, see here, Gus, did you see them men go in, jest now?"

"No. V'at men?"
"Moon Martin was one."
"Dunno him," replied Gus, shaking his head.

"Don't he live here?"
"Dunno."

"Say, ain't you the janitor?"
"Yes, I vas dot, but I don't know more than half der beebles who live here an' work here. How can I, ven dey are a t'ousand or more?"

Flip knew the building, and he was not at all surprised.

"Say, Gus, I want ter hunt an' see where them gents flopped down."

"Go along an' do it, den. Der house vas free ter all."

Gus was wholly phlegmatic, and as Flip knew his last words were true he waited for no more. Hurrying out to the street he re-entered by the same door Moon Martin had used. Before him was a stairway, and he bounded nimbly up the steps.

Once on the next floor he saw a long hall with doors opening off at intervals, but there was no sign of Moon. He stopped short, uncertain what to do.

"This floor or the next?" he inquired, half aloud. "They are mostly offices here, an' livin' rooms on the next. Was they after a business call, or a social one?"

There was no way of settling the question off-hand, so he followed the dictates of his judgment. He went up another flight of stairs. He was now in another hall, and sounds came from various points. It was where people lived, though dirt and other things told how little such quarters were to be desired.

"Beat out!" muttered Flip, in disgust. "I can't run inter them rooms, an' I guess my web is spun. Moon may be here, but ef he is, he's as safe as a fly in the coffee."

The speaker ran his hands down into his pockets and added dismally:

"Hang it!"

His gaze wandered and he noticed that the scuttle which led to the roof was open. He did not know any good reason why this fact should interest him, but, as he did not see anything else to do, he moved that way mechanically.

He mounted the ladder and stood on top of the building.

At various points there were other scuttles, and these, he readily understood, must lead to the several private rooms below. He went close to one, which was open, and listened, but nothing was to be heard. If anybody was below there was no voice to tell of it.

He moved along a few feet to a second opening. This time he was more successful—voices rose to him plainly. He listened, though without expectation of results interesting to him.

"The long and short of it is you can't go away!" angrily declared an unseen man.

"I will go!"
The retort was in a feminine tone, and Flip, every ready to appreciate pluck, murmured:

"Brave fer her!"
"How will you do it?" sneered the man.

"I just simply will not stay here."
"The door is locked."

"I command you to open it!"
"I think I see myself doin' it!"

"I will call for help."
"Do you think it would do any good?"

"There are other people in this building."

"Call to them an' see ef they will worry about you."

"Do you mean they are all villains like you?"

"I mean that they are people who mind their own business."

"And I am a prisoner among such vile creatures?"

"Ef you think you ain't, try ter git out."

"Scoundrel!"
"Ha, ha! I like your way—keep it up!"

Flip grimaced in disgust.

"Wal, now, that's a pretty gang. Got a woman prisoner, an' now they sneer at her and cut up like pirates. Wonder ef I won't fit in here somehow? I'd like a hand in the can party."

Thus far the unknown woman had been defiant, but her firm voice wavered as she spoke again.

"I do not know why you persist in mis-using me thus. What harm did I ever do you? Open the door and let me go away, and I will return immediately to Nebraska."

"Eh?—what?" muttered Flip.

"Want ter go home, do you?" laughed the man. "A good many kids get that feelin'."

Reg'lar case o' home-sickness, ain't it?"

"You know very well what it is, sir. Where is my father? Has he fallen a victim to the vile plot by which you lured us here? Where is David Starling?"

"I thought so," murmured Flip. "That voice is Moon Martin's, an' he's got Dave's gal here. Say, Flip, old man, you want ter git a move on immediate. Hey, but I'll jest about bag this gang before the sun sets. Don't hurry, Old Sol!"

He glanced at the orb of day, which was nearing the horizon.

From below came the voice of Moon Martin.

"You may as well stop this whimperin'. Et none o' your business where Davey is, an' I won't tell. I come in because I heard you had been cuttin' up rusty. Now, this must stop. We don't want no muss, an' we won't hev none. Ef you are decent we will use you wal, but I am here ter say that ef you don't act mild, we'll make you wish you had. See?"

"I see, ef she don't!" muttered Flip.

He had been lying down with his head close to the scuttle, but he now leaped to his feet.

"Moon is in an ugly mood, an' he's dangerous!" added the spy. "I guess I don't want ter lose no time in gettin' help fer the gal. It will end my game with Addison Oates, but et must be done. Hullo!"

He had reached the point where he had come up, and had gone with the intention of descending, but he stopped right there. The scuttle had been closed.

He reached down and tried to lift it.

"Fastened, by gum!"

Flip did not give up at once, and he pulled with all his strength, but in vain. He could not lift the door.

"I shall hev ter go down through somebody else's rooms," was his decision. "I don't like ter, fer it—What's that?"

A scream sounded from where he had left Moon and the captive.

"Help, help!" was the cry.

CHAPTER IX.

A LIVELY STRUGGLE.

FLIP rushed to the scuttle. He did not know what was occurring below, but he believed Moon Martin capable of almost anything, and he feared for the safety of the captive woman.

Again sounded the cry—

"Help, help!"

"By gum! I can't stand that! Here goes!"

Flip rushed down the steps, taking considerable risk of breaking his neck in the headlong pace. When he was at the bottom he was in almost total darkness, but he readily distinguished a passage beyond, and he made a few more leaps and was in a room.

There, too, the light was very faint, but he distinguished two persons in a struggle.

"Boys," he cried, in his usual airy fashion, "count me inter this gambol. All hands around!"

He flung himself into the two persons with the full impetus of his rush, and one of them was bowled over like a ten-pin. This person went sprawling on the floor.

"That's the way I did when I was center-rush on the Rag-pickers' Football team," lightly added the boy.

The man sprung to his feet

"Who did that?" he sharply demanded.

"I did," cheerfully answered Flip, "but I didn't know the gun was loaded."

"Who in perdition are you?"

"I'm Uncle Isaac's nephew."

"Where did you come from?"

"Right from the place where I was before I come."

The man stood in silence. Flip recognized his voice and knew it was Moon Martin, but the semi-darkness of the room prevented the thug from recognizing him in return. The woman was close to Flip, and she whispered:

"Be careful or he will do you harm."

"He ain't built right," confidently asserted Flip.

"Do you live in this house?" added the man.

"Yes, I do!" replied Flip, warily.

"How dare you meddle here?"

"I thought it was some o' the kids inter a scrap, so I took a hand. I'm a peach at a scrap."

"Well, get out o' this room!"

"I guess I'll sorter stay an' visit with you. I'm a sociable sort of a chrysanthemum, anyhow. I'll stay."

"Get out, or I'll break your head!"

Moon advanced threateningly, and his voice carried as much suggestion as his words. Again the woman whispered a word of warning, but Flip remained unconcerned.

"Don't rush the cable car, mister. I can't see the door, it's so blamed dark here."

"I'll help you find it."

Surlily muttering this promise, Moon moved toward the door, and Flip turned to his female companion.

"Say," he whispered, "be you Nell Starling?"

"Yes; oh! yes. Do you know—"

"I know we've got ter hump ourselves or there will be riot here. The minute you see the way clear do you rush out o' the door. See?"

"Yes. But—"

Moon turned after swinging the door wide open.

"Now get out!" he ordered, angrily.

"So I will. I'm glad ter hev made your acquaintance, an' I hope you will be chummy, after this. I live right on the other side o' the hall, an' the latch string is always out. Pull it, mister, an'—"

"Will you go?" shouted Moon.

"Sure! I'll leave my card, so you—"

Flip began to fumble in his pocket; but Moon, who saw that he was being trifled with, lost all patience. Forgetting that the

open door made way for somebody besides the intruder, he rushed at Flip.

"I'll throw you down the stairs!" he cried.

Nell Starling was keeping her nerve admirably, and the open way was not lost. She made a rush—just a moment too soon. If she had waited a bit Moon would have been engaged with Flip. As it was, the thug stopped short.

"Hold up!" he shouted.

He made a forward dive to intercept her, but somebody else was in motion, too. Flip leaped at the fellow and twined his arms around Moon's neck.

"Count me inter the waltz!" requested the irrepressible boy.

Nell disappeared, and Moon was wild. In his mad haste to get hold of her he tried to disregard Flip. The result was that he ran into the hall with his assailant clinging to his neck and dangling from his back. A few steps he was able to go thus without difficulty, but Flip was no small weight and he began to falter.

"Let go!" he snarled.

"Don't hurry," advised Flip. "I said I wanted ter give you my card before you left."

Moon muttered something very savage, and then essayed to get at Flip. He swung his big fists over his shoulders and tried to tear the boy away, but Flip appeared to be there to stay. All his efforts were in vain. Moon pranced around wildly, but the human burr was not to be shaken off.

"I'll strangle you!" hissed the maddened thug. "I'll—"

"Take my card before you go! I want you ter know who I be!" persisted Flip.

Nell had wholly disappeared from view, and the rescuer wanted to do the same thing, but he did not dare to let go his hold. If he did, there was good reason for believing he would come to grief. He had Moon fast, and Moon had him. How was he to break the connection safely?

The question was settled for him. When it dawned upon the thug that he could not shake off his handicap, he bethought himself of another way. Swinging himself around, he suddenly ran against the wall backwards, bumping Flip violently against it, with his own weight to aid the shock.

"How do you like it?" cried Moon.

The boy did not like it at all. He had received a heavy shock, and when he saw Moon preparing for another effort of the same sort, he decided that it was time for him to part company with Moon. He released his hold and made a rush for the stairs.

"Hold on!" cried the thug.

"Too late; I've jest let go!" retorted Flip.

He was at the head of the stairs, and lost no time in making use of them. He bounded down with agility, but his enemy was by this time worked up to a boiling pitch, and he pursued with equal speed.

Flip no longer had any fear of personal violence, but certain other things occurred to him. Though he could keep out of Moon's reach he could not reach the street in time to get out of sight, and as day still lingered there he judged he would be recognized by the thug.

"I've got ter prevent that or my usefulness at Ad Oates's dive is gone," thought the boy.

"I must use strategy."

He passed the outer door and then executed his device. Instead of running along the street he took a few steps to one side and dodged into another doorway—one which, as he had expected, proved to be another entrance to the building, and, consequently, just the place for his scheme.

"Ef Mooney wants me he'll hev ter rikker-shay up skyward," was his muttered comment. "I ain't ter be— Eh?—what?"

He had a surprise. When he dashed out

of the building he was dimly conscious that somebody else was near the door, but not until now had he looked fully. The look brought dismay.

Shoestrings was there on the sidewalk, and standing with a bewildered air which told that he had recognized his friend and could not understand the situation. And he was directly in Moon's path.

CHAPTER X.

MOON MARTIN'S MISHAPS.

ALARMED for his ally's safety Flip had opened his lips to warn him, but at that moment Moon Martin shot out of the door. The latter had met with a tumble when coming down, and he looked dusty and bruised, but the mishap had only rendered him the more ugly. He was frantic with rage, and eager to get his hands on the author of all this trouble.

Unluckily for Shoestrings he was the only person near the door, and while the meek vender of shoe-laces stared Moon pounced upon him.

"I've got you!" cried the tough.

He had, beyond doubt, but Shoestrings did not understand.

"Wh—wh—what?" he stammered.

"No use o' your tryin' ter git away, you brat!"

"I ain't a brat, sir."

"You're a thief!"

"W'ot?"

"You've stole from me."

"Oh, oh!" cried Shoestrings, horrified.

"Give me that watch back."

"W'ot watch?"

"The one you stole from me."

Moon had decided on a plan of action. It would never do to confess that a boy had come in and stopped him while he was seeking to whip a woman. More, the intruder ought to be silenced, if possible. If he could be locked up as a thief his counter charges would not go for much.

"The mean skunk!" muttered Flip, catching the scheme.

Shoestrings was not so quick-witted, and he simply stared at his accuser in blank dismay.

"I—I don't understand," he replied.

"You will hev time ter do that when you git to the Tombs. You shall be shut up an' made ter sweat fer this. Where's that watch, you thief?"

"I ain't got yer darned old watch!" cried Shoestrings, with a sudden rush of pluck.

"Let me go, you old crook!"

"Out with it. Where's that watch, I say?"

Moon saw people looking from adjacent windows, and some pedestrians were beginning to gather. He let all hear what he said, and his hands clawed over Shoestrings in search of the alleged missing article.

Now, under an exterior of meekness Shoestrings hid plenty of courage, and bewilderment was beginning to give place to anger. He did not like to be called a thief, nor did he like to have Moon so free with his person.

"Lemme go!" he repeated, struggling bravely.

Moon held on.

"Take that, then!"

Shoestrings's patience was gone, and he shot out his small fist, and took his enemy a sharp tap in the nose. It made Moon's head fly back, and it made him utter a cry of pain, and then came a little rivulet of red from Moon's nose.

Flip fairly danced with joy.

"Oh, ain't that kid a peach!" he exclaimed, exultantly.

The victim of this blow was now more enraged than ever. He was a big, burly fellow, and if he had been battling with a man he would have made it hot for him without delay, but he was well aware that the gathering

crowd would not tolerate such violence on his part—now.

"That settles it!" he cried; "you are a thief, an' now you'll go ter the lock-up. Come along!"

He began to pull, and Flip's joy faded away. It would be hard to prove that Shoestrings was not the wanted boy unless his own identity was revealed, and this never would do. Flip decided on another plan. Thus far no policeman was in sight, and the crowd was inclined to give hearty sympathy to Shoestrings.

Flip did not believe they would change their allegiance, and he acted with this theory in mind.

Moon's back was toward the building, and Flip suddenly shot out from his hiding-place. Putting all of his vim into the attempt he ran headlong into Moon, and once more that luckless person sprawled in the dust.

"Run, Shoestrings!" was Flip's command.

He was afraid he would not be obeyed, so he caught at his friend's arm and pulled him along. Shoestrings's wits returned to him, and when they came he did not need urging.

Side by side, the boys darted off down the street.

The much-upset Mr. Moon Martin regained his feet after a struggle, but when he did so he just caught a glimpse of the pair as they swiftly receded.

"Stop them!" he implored.

It was a mechanical cry, for they were well away from everybody's reach, but he was not disposed to give in so tamely. He rushed in pursuit, but when he turned the first corner he stopped short.

The boys were not to be seen anywhere.

A convenient alley had afforded them means of retreat to the next street, but the pursuer was long in making this discovery, and when he did so they were several blocks off and perfectly safe. When Flip was assured of the latter fact he let up on his rapid gait, much to Shoestrings's relief.

"I guess we are goin' ter hev a thaw," remarked Flip. "I feel kinder warm."

"Oh! Flip, w'ot has happened?"

"One moment, my frien'. Did you deliver them letters?"

"Yes."

"That's right; always be faithful ter your trusts, an' sometime you will be a poll-clerk in an election deestric an' git rich."

"W'ot was the trouble at that house?"

"Nothin'; only you had a scrap an' smacked a feller in the nose."

"I mean before that—w'ot trouble did you have?"

"Wal, me an' Moon Martin was playin' football, an' I bucked the center an' he tackled foul, an' I went around the end fer a gain o' two yards—"

"Flip, will you be serious?"

"Mr. Shoestrings, ter be frank, I hev been rickkershayin' with our enemies, the fire-bugs."

"Was that them?"

"I guess et was."

"You are awful reckless."

"Not a hair; not a hair! You see, I've sold out ter the enemy an' entered their employ. Moon is a bit cranky, an' me an' him had a scrap, but we didn't hurt each other. Et was all in good part, only I remonstrated against his usin' the gal so— Say where is that gal?"

"W'ot one?"

"Didn't you see nobody come flyin' out o' the house ahead o' me?"

"Why, yes; there was a young lady did that."

"Where did she go?"

"Off down the street."

"Fast?"

"Yes."

"Then le's go home. We might as wal hunt fer a Welsh rabbit in a menagerie.

We'll go home— No, we won't; we'll go an' see Peter Mainford. I want ter know how he's comin' on with his case."

"I want ter hev supper, an' then go down by the ferry an' sell some shoe-laces."

"My frien', your habits o' industry will make you bankrupt some day. Shoot yer old shoe-strings! Come along with me!"

The younger boy was accustomed to having Flip domineer over him, and as he always yielded, he did so now. They went to Peter's house and were soon in conversation with him. Flip had said nothing to Shoestrings about his latest adventures, and he was not more precipitate with Peter.

That man was in despair. His house had been damaged by the fire, but he had insurance on his goods, so he would lose nothing. It was different with the model of his invention. He was quite sure that if he could get it back before somebody else had used it to secure a patent he would become the richest man in the world—so he expressed it.

"Just think," he added, with enthusiasm, "what it would be to have our streets lighted with electricity not as they are now—with a big, glaring light remote from its fellow lights—but small lights only a few inches apart—little jets attached to the rods which would run under the eaves of every house and business building in New York. A big light, strong, steady, mild, glorious. Think of it!"

He jumped up and began to pace the room excitedly, reveling in the thought.

"How about expense?" inquired Flip.

"No greater than now. My plan would fix that."

"I hope ter see it, boss."

"You shall if the model is recovered."

"How many men hev you told this to?"

"Nobody but the companies I have tried to sell to."

"No rivals?"

"No."

"Ever hear of a man named Addison Oates?"

"No."

"Or Moon Martin?"

"No."

Flip had another question ready, but he suddenly paused as he caught sight of a something which seized upon his interest.

"Say, is that another electric light box?" he demanded, abruptly.

CHAPTER XI.

A MYSTERIOUS TRUST.

As Flip asked the question he pointed to emphasize it, and Mainford easily understood.

"No," he responded, "that is a different thing. In fact, I don't know what it is."

"It's a box."

"I know, but I am wholly ignorant of the nature of its contents."

"You don't say so. How is that?"

As Flip spoke he rose and went to the object referred to. It was a box of wood, and quite stoutly made. It was not large, but it had arrested Flip's attention for good reasons.

"There is a story attached to that box," explained Peter Mainford. "It came to me in an odd way."

"Who from?"

"I don't know."

"How is that?"

"It was left in my charge, but by whom and for what reason I can't say, because I don't know."

"That looks right mysterious on the surface, but mebbe you kin take the kinks out ef you will. Develop the secret, Peter, will ye?"

"I think I may safely tell all I know. It was like this. One rainy evening, about six weeks ago, I was standing at the mouth of the alley, looking out inter the street. It was one of those damp, foggy evenings which are peculiar to New York, and folks had

their umbrellas up even if the rainfall was slight.

"While I stood there, seeming to be the only idle person in the vicinity, my attention was suddenly arrested by sight of a young woman who was coming down the street with a burden in her arms so big and heavy that she walked with difficulty."

"Briefly, it was the box you see yonder, but, as it was then covered with a cloth, I could make out no more than that it was mighty heavy for her. Hardly anybody was on the street, and she received no attention from anybody, but when only a few feet from me she suddenly staggered, leaned the burden against the wall of a house and then let it fall to the ground."

"I can go no further!" she exclaimed.

"I thought she had a good face, and I was so moved with pity that I stepped out into plain sight and said:

"Can I help you, miss?"

"She started nervously, but I suppose she noticed that I did not look like a thief. She soon quieted down."

"What can you do?" she asked, with commendable directness.

"Well, I might give you a lift, or house the burden you have—you see, I didn't want to volunteer too much in a wet night—or I would go for a carriage, if you say so."

"Do you live near here?" she demanded, almost fiercely, I thought.

"Right here, miss," I replied.

"Are you an honest man?"

"I think so," I said, after meditating for a bit.

"Would you keep this box for me?"

"If you wish, yes."

"Let me look at you!"

"She came up right in front of me, and we faced toward the nearest street lamp. The light was not strong, for the fog was thick, but the way she looked at me was enough to enable her to read my very heart. It was a trifle trying to me, but her manner was all in her favor—I did not get angry or worried."

"Finally she started back."

"Enough!" she cried, "I know I can trust you; you are honest!"

"Then she made herself a little plainer. She couldn't carry the box any further, and she was in trouble. She was law abiding, she assured me, and had nothing to fear except that she had enemies; but she had great need of that box being sheltered."

"Boys, it seems very queer, even now, but she confided the box to me—and I a total stranger!"

"What then?" demanded Flip, eagerly.

"She went off, and I haven't seen her since."

"W'ot was her name?"

"She didn't give it."

"That's odd."

"So it is; but she was confused, and so was I, I guess. Anyhow, I took the box in for her, and there it is. She never has been after it, nor have I heard from her, nor do I know where she lives, or one single thing about her."

"W'ot's in the box?" asked Shoestrings, quickly.

"I don't know. She didn't say, and I haven't opened it. The box is fastened."

Flip was thinking. His head was lowered, and he seemed to find something very absorbing. He said nothing.

"Do you really think it is valuable?" proceeded Shoestrings.

"It may be."

"Then why don't she come after it?"

"I don't know. There is a good deal of trouble in this world. The girl was in trouble then, and she may be worse off now. I can't help suspecting that that is why she hasn't come for it. She was a nice-looking girl, too—so fine and straightforward of look, you see. She wasn't a bit like most girls around here."

Flip looked up suddenly.
 "W'ot was the p'int o' difference, mister?" he asked.
 "Oh! her dress, her complexion, and her general manner and looks."
 "Hayseedy?"
 "Not exactly, but I don't think she was a city girl."
 "Sorter sunburned?"
 "Yes."
 "Red hair?"
 "Oh! no; black hair."
 "A little bit cross-eyed."
 "Indeed she was not; she was a fine-looking girl, I say. She had a good face, with rosy cheeks and rich black hair, and she had a form of health, too. Just about what one would expect in a Western girl."
 Flip pounded his knee forcibly.
 "Just so, by gum!" he cried, loudly.
 "What do you mean?"
 "I mean that you have been barkin' up the wrong tree. You accuse somebody o' stealin' your model. Now, I'll bet my uppers your model ain't worth shucks ter the thieves who got it!"
 Mr. Mainford looked decidedly miffed.
 "Why shouldn't it be, when they took all the trouble, and its cash value is—"
 "Hold hard, Peter! They took et by mistake!"
 "By mistake?"
 "Yes."
 "Impossible!"
 "Peter, I ain't a second-sight chicken, but you kin bet high I am right on this. The thieves made a mistake on boxes. That is the box they meant ter get."
 He pointed to the mysterious article left by the girl.
 "Why do you think that?" asked Mainford, somewhat bewildered.
 "Because it looks reasonable. I don't know w'ot is inter this box, but it was o' value ter the girl, an' it was the same ter the thieves. That is the box they tried fer, Peter, not yours."
 "Is it so valuable as that?"
 "I don't know its value."
 "Then why do you ascribe any value whatever to it? How do you know it has value?"
 Flip moved uneasily in his chair. He had become deeply interested in his detective case, and he wished to carry it on to an end without help or hindrance from anybody. He knew he could not tell his story without having the whole police force for well-meaning but meddlesome allies. He meditated, and answered disingenuously:
 "Why, a man with a blind eye an' a wen on his thumb-toe could see that. First, the girl was carrying the box along the streets of a rainy night when her strength wasn't equal to it. Then she confided it ter you, with many a word an' beseechment. Next, the boxes are a good 'eal alike, ef you don't look at them too sharp. Of course they got the wrong box—this is the one they wanted."
 Mainford shook his head.
 "You do not prove your statement."
 "Never mind, the truth may come out."
 "Yes, when the thieves rob me of my invention."
 Flip was not disposed to try again to encourage a man who wanted a full bill of particulars, so he let Peter worry all he wanted to, and kept his own counsel.
 Presently the two boys took their leave.
 "Be you goin' home now, Flip?" asked Shoestrings.
 "I am goin' ter put my young life inter vital danger an' beard the wicked in their haunts o' vice, much ter my corporeal disfiggerment, mebbe."
 Flip spoke in a deep, sepulchral and mournful voice, and his choice of words was such that Shoestrings understood nothing, and was led to exclaim:
 "Gr-gr-great Scott! w'ot is that?"

"Sort of a funeral panegyric, my friend; a farewell before I go inter noxious peril. Now I am goin'. So-long!"

CHAPTER XII.

A THRILLING ADVENTURE.

FLIP started off, but his puzzled companion called him back and asked for an explanation. This was just what Flip wanted. Young as he was he was a good deal like public persons of mature years—he wanted to make a sensation and he talked about and wondered over.
 "Do tell me w'ot you mean!" urged Shoestrings, whereupon the delighted but perverse Flip came to business with brevity.
 "I am on the track o' them fire-bugs an' thieves, an' I am goin' ter spill them inter the drink, ef they don't do me up previous!" was the declaration.
 "How, Flip?"
 Then the elder boy told all. He knew he could trust Shoestrings implicitly, so he did not hesitate to explain the full situation. When it was done Shoestrings brightened up amazingly.
 "I'll help you, Flip!" he cried.
 "Course you will, old man."
 "I'll go right there with ye."
 "Can't be done. I am goin' ter walk in on Addison Oates as cool as ef nothin' had happened. There may be the biggest sort of a riot immediately after. Ef Moon Martin is there he may know me. Ef he does—oh! won't I be inter et! Then there is their pal, Dick, whom I ain't seen yet, so fur as I know. He is advertised ter know me when he sees me. I am goin' right inter the lions' den, Shoestrings, jest as Daniel did; an' I may come out in the lion's stomach."
 It was not a pleasant prospect, but Flip did not waver. Even his usually quiet companion was in favor of the plan, since it gave promise of fame and victory for them.
 "Somebody ought ter go ahead with it, an' go inter their den," argued Shoestrings, "An' I had rather you would do it then me."
 "All right: I'm the peach fer the job. All I ask is that you linger near so as ter preach my obituary ef they do me up. Come on!"
 They set off on their journey and soon arrived at the building where the Arizona Land Company made its quarters. There was no light in the office, and Flip saw that he would have to go direct to the living rooms to see the gang.
 He posted Shoestrings as seemed best, and then went ahead. Entering the house he moved up-stairs and reached the door. He tried it—it was locked. He knocked; there was no reply. He knocked again, but with the same result.
 "Crickey!" he muttered, "have they flown the coop?"
 When he had repeated his summons he decided that he was beaten for the time being, and he reluctantly retraced his steps and reported to his ally.
 "Either there gin't nobody there, or they won't answer," was his summary.
 "I guess they hev got scared."
 "Like as not."
 "W'ot be we ter do?"
 "I don't see no use of tryin' ter run them down, so we may as wal work another plan."
 "What?"
 "Try ter get sight o' Dave Sterling or his daughter. Both o' them are somewheres, you know, an' Dave, fer one, is likely ter be paradin' the street on his hunt. We may fall in with them."
 It was about the only chance left to them, and, though they had no real hope of making any discoveries, they set out to try it.
 During the next few hours they covered a good deal of territory and encountered a good many different persons, but those they sought were not among the number.

Finally their search grew aimless, and they found themselves down near the East River. Without any comments they continued their walk and finally stood on the edge of a pier.
 "All quiet," murmured Flip. "We are mightily torn up in mind, but I don't see that the river feels it a bit. She seems ter flow on serenely, an' the waves don't boil an atom in the docks."
 "See that old craft down yonder, Flip?"
 "Yes."
 "It's wreck. It was towed in yesterday an' left there. All the things in it hev been took out, an' that's why it is so still an' dark there."
 Wrecks are of interest, and Flip asked questions as to how this particular one had occurred. During the conversation they moved forward and stood close to the disabled craft. There was no watchman on the pier to stop them, nor did they see anybody on the craft.
 Obeying an idle impulse they slid down to the deck and stood looking around.
 "Le's go down below," suggested Shoestrings.
 "Maybe we'll git gobbled fer robbers, but ef they don't care enough about the wreck ter set a watchman they can't complain ef we do it. Down we go."
 The utter darkness made their movements necessarily slow, but they finally stood in the main cabin.
 "Uh-h-h!" muttered Shoestrings, "I don't like this!"
 "Why not?"
 "Too dark."
 "There ought ter be a lamp, or somethin' o' the sort here. We will look fer one."
 Shoestrings was willing his friend should do this, and he said so, whereupon Flip started. While he had a general knowledge of the interior of a ship he did not know just where to search for what he wanted, and he was moving slowly along when he had a sudden shock.
 His arm was seized in a tenacious grasp. Flip started back; the unknown force held him secure. He gave a strong jerk—he failed to free his arm.
 "Say, Shoestrings, is that you?" he demanded.
 "Yes, I'm here," came the second explorer's voice from a point several feet away.
 "Then what in blazes is this?"
 He struggled again to free his arm, but without result. Then the hostile force suddenly became more aggressive. He was dragged forward.
 "Let go, shoot you!" he cried.
 "W'ot is it?" demanded Shoestrings, from the rear.
 "Lemme get—lemme go!"
 The voice floated back to Shoestrings, and he heard a struggle—then all became silent. He waited for a moment, uncertain whether Flip was joking or in trouble, but as the lull continued Shoestrings became frightened.
 "Flip!" he called.
 There was no reply.
 "What are you doin'?"
 Whatever Flip was doing he did not explain, and the younger boy had strong symptoms of a panic. He was scared, and he wanted to run, but he was a loyal friend and would not go. If his companion was in trouble he intended to stand by him.
 The darkness and stillness of the cabin was most impressive, and it seemed to Shoestrings that his heart was trying to jump out of his throat. Where was Flip? Was anybody else there? Had trouble come to his ally?
 He saw only one way of solving these riddles, and he took that way.
 He began a slow advance.
 "I'm goin' right toward where Flip went," he thought. "I wonder w'ot will happen ter me?"
 The first thing that happened was a very

creepy feeling all over him, and he wanted to back out but would not.

He reached the dangerous spot and then stopped.

"See here!" he suddenly cried, with a sort of reckless bravery, "is anybody here?"

"Yes, I am here!"

It was a gruff voice by his side, and then he was seized and held as Flip had been. He, too, struggled in vain, and he was dragged forward several feet.

"Lemme go—lemme go!" he cried, unconsciously repeating his ally's very words.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the man who held him, but it was not a pleasant laugh.

"Darn you, take that!" snapped Shoestrings, and he drove his fist into the captor's body with force that brought a grunt of pain.

Suddenly the darkness faded away, and the cabin became plain in all its parts. Shoestrings's eyes were dazzled, but he made out enough so he knew what the situation was, to a certain extent.

By his side stood a negro, and a little ways off was a white man. There was no sign of Flip.

The negro gave his captive a shake.

"How dared you hit me?" he demanded.

"How dared you ketch me?" retorted the boy.

The white man came forward quickly.

"What were you doing in this cabin?" he snarled.

"Nothin'," answered Shoestrings.

"You are a thief."

"No, I ain't; I ain't took nothin'."

"You were the one that was taken. We nipped your scheme in the bud. Still, your guilt is certain. You came in to steal."

"I thought the darned old ship was deserted," lamented the captive.

"Do you think so now? If so, we will change your mind."

CHAPTER XIII.

EXCITING EVENTS ON THE WRECK.

SHOESTRINGS was worried, and all the more so because he believed he knew the man who was doing the talking. That person had a big black beard, and he had not forgotten that Flip had pictured Addison Oates very much as this man looked. It might have been a wild theory on the boy's part, but it was natural under the circumstances.

He was not too much frightened to forget his friend. In that crisis Flip would have seemed like a bulwark of safety, and his gaze wandered around the place.

"What are you looking for?" snapped the black-bearded man.

"The other boy."

"Dead!"

"What?"

"We tied a weight to him and dropped him into the dock. Unless he is part fish he is dead now—drowned."

"Oh!" gasped Flip.

The white man surveyed the prisoner critically for a moment, and then a half-smile crossed his face. He turned to the negro.

"I guess, Tim," he remarked, "this kid is no more than an idle wanderer of the piers, but we shall have to deal with him according to the plan he has himself marked out. Silence him!"

Black Tim's hand glided to Shoestrings's throat, and the last chance to sound an alarm was gone. The two men seemed to know their business well, and in a short time their united efforts had rendered Shoestrings helpless.

"Where shall we put him?" asked Tim.

"Oh! throw him into the state-room yonder," was the careless reply.

"It is one that was broke in the wreck."

"Never mind; he can't get clear with all those ropes on him. Toss him in. When we

get time we will drown him like we have his fellow thief. Ha, ha! Won't it be rich when the police find their bodies."

He of the black beard looked at Shoestrings and appeared to gloat over his present and prospective sufferings. Shoestrings showed his alarm. He was not a coward, and could stand up bravely when he had a chance, but who can fight bravely when there is no hope?

"Away with him!" suddenly added the white man.

The captive was picked up and tossed into the state-room.

"That comes of meddling," added the leader, as they moved off.

"Yes. He should hev known better."

"We must carry out our plan. He will die with the rest, but it will not be our fault."

Die? Shoestrings shivered as he heard the words. What terrible event was before them?

He was in narrow quarters, for the ship had not boasted of elegance. The light that floated in from the cabin revealed a break in the wall of the state-room which looked ragged and suggested the wreck of which he had heard. This did not then seem of importance to him.

"I shall soon go ter join Flip," he thought. "Poor Flip! He was a faithful frien' an' an honest kid. He may be better off than when he was with me, but I think I shall be better off alive."

He still had view of the cabin, and he watched the two men there.

They did not seem to think longer of him, and they acted as if worried about something. They talked in low tones, and he noticed that they occasionally walked forward and looked up toward the deck.

"They're expectin' somebody," thought the prisoner. "I hope et won't make things any worse than they are now. This is the very gang that we are after. Flip said the negro was named Tim, an' that is w'ot this negro is called. I wish Flip—Poor Flip! It was awful that he had ter die so young. He always wanted ter be an alderman, an' now he can't."

Shoestrings paused to sigh. Then he gave a start.

The sigh was echoed close to him.

"Crickey! who is that?"

He looked around, and, dim though the light was, satisfied himself that nobody else was in the state-room.

"Mebbe et was Flip's ghost!" he thought.

Again the sigh.

"No, I don't believe et is. Flip had kinder a husky voice, an' this one is clear—fullo!"

There was an unmistakable stir close to him, and it settled one thing. It came from the next state-room, and just beyond the break in the wall before noted.

"Somethin' is in there. I wonder ef it's a human bein'? I'll try my luck with it. Say!"

He whispered a call, lowering his voice until such a thing seemed safe. There was no reply, but again came the stir.

"Say!"

Again he whispered, but nothing came of it.

"Et may be a tiger, or a snake!"

This thought gave him a momentary chill, but the more he thought of it, the less he felt alarmed.

"Tigers an' snakes wouldn't be no worse than them reptiles out there."

He considered the possibility that Flip was still alive, but due meditation convinced him that, if this was so, the person or thing in the next room was not his ally. He and Flip had numerous ways by which they could make themselves known to each other in such an emergency, even if their mouths were bound so as to prevent speaking.

Plainly, he was not near Flip.

Presently there was sound of steps on the deck above.

"They come!" cried the man with the black beard.

"Shall I douse the glim?" asked Tim.

"No. I heard Dick's signal—this is our man. If he has the other fellow, all is well. Receive them."

The black-bearded man dodged into another state-room, and then the steps sounded on the stairs. Two men came down. Tim stood bowing and smiling blandly.

"Good-evenin', gents!" he spoke.

"Where's the lady?" demanded one of the men.

"She's makin' her toilet, sah, but she will be here directly."

"I have brought her father. This is Mr. David Starling."

"Glad ter meet you, sah," replied Tim, with another bow.

"Hurry up the lady. Her father wants ter see her."

"Is my child really here?" demanded Dave Starling, quickly.

"Oh, yes, sah."

"It seems very queer ter me."

"Nothin' so very queer, sah. You see, I own dis ship now it's been in a wreck, an' it lays right by this pier all the time. The lady she was down disaway when she was chased by toughs. She sprained her ankle, an' they had things pretty much their own way until I sailed in an' drove them off. Then I took her on board—"

"I have explained all this," broke in the third man.

"No doubt, Mister Dick."

"Briefly, the gal couldn't walk on account o' her ankle, but she was in powerful distress o' mind, an' the nigger seen me an' got me ter go an' hunt you up. Et was a wild-goose chase fer awhile, but I finally found ye, an' here we be."

"Speak to Nell, an' let her know I am here," urged Dave.

Tim promptly went to a door and rapped.

"Say," he cried, "yer pa is here. Hurry up!"

Then he bent his head, smiled and walked back.

"She says she will be out in a jiffy," he added.

All this was seen and heard by Shoestrings. It gave him a very uncomfortable feeling. He knew that Dave Starling was being deceived. He did not think Nell was on board the ship, and if she was it was certain she was not free to go and come as they pretended.

"Dave has run his head inter a trap!" thought the boy.

There could be no doubt of that. Of course the black-bearded man was Addison Oates. He was well known to Dave, so he was keeping out of sight, but his tools were deceiving Dave. It was a trap, beyond doubt.

CHAPTER XIV.

A TERRIBLE SCHEME.

SHOESTRINGS did some clever thinking. If he was to believe all that had been said to him he could not make his own situation any worse, do what he might, and there was a possibility that prompt action might help Dave Starling.

"By jing! I am goin' ter sing out!" decided the captive. "I s'pose they will rush right in an' do me up, but et must be tried. I'll holler an' see—"

Just then Dick broke a brief silence.

"Excuse me for a moment," he requested, "I think I heard a step on deck. We hev ter keep the tramps off. I'll go up, but I'll come right back."

He had been moving toward the stairs while he spoke, and he now hastened up.

"Mebbe I had better see that nothin' happens ter him," added Tim. "I'll jest

poke my head up, but I won't go further. Wait a bit!"

He followed Dick.

Starling was left alone, and he appeared a little uneasy. He looked after the men and his lips moved once. Doubtless he saw the possibility of trouble, but his mind took a new turn. He moved quickly to the door behind which the girl was said to be.

"Nell, Nell!" he cried, "are you there?"

Evidently he heard nothing.

"Nell, Nell! Speak to me if you are there!"

"Mister!" cried Shoestrings, losing all fear of consequences, "you won't find nobody there, an' ef you don't hustle this gang will do ye up fer keeps!"

The ranchman sprang back. He looked around wildly.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

"You are in a trap, mister!"

"Who speaks?"

"Me! Skip off from this ship quicker than a cat. You hev been lured here ter be done up. Skip!"

Bang!

There was a clatter above, and dust was swept down to the cabin. Dave rushed forward with long steps.

"They hev shut up the stairs!" he cried. "I can't get on deck!"

He dashed up the steps, and Shoestrings heard him hammer on the obstacle as he reached the highest possible point.

"By jing! we are in fer it!" exclaimed Shoestrings. "They've shut us in, an' now their work is complete. We won't cut ice no more."

The ranchman came bounding back.

"Who spoke?" he demanded, excitedly. "Where be you?"

"This way, this way!" answered Shoestrings, hurriedly.

Starling rushed into the state-room. Both he and the boy had grown more excited, and they spoke in concert. With a perfect medley of sound was united action on the ranchman's part, and he dragged Shoestrings out into the cabin.

"Quick, quick!" urged the latter. "Get off my ropes!"

Out came a knife, and the bonds were promptly severed. Shoestrings leaped to his feet.

"What is it?" cried the rescuer.

"Mister, we are both in the worst of fixes," responded the boy. "Didn't you know them men? They were part o' the gang that has been makin' all this trouble fer you, an' that stole your Nell—"

"Nell, Nell! Where is she?" cried Dave.

"I don't know."

"Ain't she on board this vessel?"

"I don't think she is; I ain't seen her. Fact is, you've been lured here by yer enemies, an' they mean ter—I don't know what they intend ter do. They are jest bad enough ter do ye up. Git out on the run ef you can. Come!"

Shoestrings rushed up the stairs and banged against the obdurate surface that closed the companionway. The effort showed him how useless such an effort was.

"What do they intend ter do?" repeated Starling.

"Mister, I don't know. It may be ter imprison us, or it may be worse. Oh! I wish Flip an' me hadn't—"

The new turn of his thoughts brought his companion back to mind. He turned and hurried to the cabin again. Despite the dismal statements of his enemies, there was no proof that Flip had been slain, and he wanted the clear head of his old associate. It was plain that if Flip was alive he must be in one of the state-rooms, and Shoestrings took measures to learn if this was so. He remembered the mysterious sighs and movements near him, and looked there first.

The opening of the door showed a human form.

"Flip, Flip, hev I found you?" he joyfully cried.

He seized upon the person and pulled lustily toward the cabin. As he passed the door, however, he had a surprise; the person was a young woman, bound and gagged.

He was so much surprised that he dropped her then and there.

"Gr-gr-great Scott!" he gasped.

A lion-like roar rose behind him.

"Nell, Nell, my Nell!" shouted Dave Starling.

The burly ranchman pounced upon the girl, and Shoestrings saw that one thing was settled. Another was not, and he still remembered Flip.

"He must be here, ef he's alive. Where is he?"

The boy ran into the nearest state-room, but he found it empty. Only one more remained unseen, and his heart was heavy as he rushed that way. He tore the door open; he dashed in.

A peculiar gurgle sounded directly before him. He looked and saw Flip in the same helpless condition that had marked Nell's captivity.

"Whoop!" cried the rescuer.

Flip gurgled again, and his friend moved to advantage. His hands were busy, and he soon had a part of the bonds off. Flip gave his help, and the rest was soon removed. The older boy leaped to his feet.

"Jiminy crickets!" he shouted, "this is the pizenest Fourth o' July I ever see! Where are we at?"

He hastened to the cabin with Shoestrings at his heels. Dave Starling was still embracing his daughter. Flip danced up and down in his excitement.

"Where be the heathen?" he demanded. "Show them ter me! Let me git at them! Shoestrings, what has become o' the drasted gang?"

But Shoestrings stood in silence, his head bent forward in an attitude of profound listening. Something important appeared to have come to his notice. Then he abruptly lifted his head.

"They are goin' ter kidnap us!" he exclaimed. "They are takin' us off ter sea!"

"Wot's that?"

"The ship is in motion!"

There was a dull lurch as he ended, and Flip lifted his head with a sudden change of countenance. Despite his questions he knew what the situation was as well as anybody there, and he now grasped more than the others knew.

"They've scuttled the ship!" he cried.

"What?"

"I heard them down below, and I thought then I heard the water gurgle in the hold. Say, this was all planned in advance—they filled her up as much as she could stand an' then plugged it with oakum until they got us. Now, the plugs hev been took out, an' we are ter go down with the ship!"

"We are floatin' out o' the dock."

"Yes, so as to sink in the river."

"That means death ter us."

"Sure!"

Silence fell momentarily on the little party. Dave Starling and his daughter were not sailors, but if they did not understand as much as the river-bred boys, they did realize what it would mean to sink in the East River.

"What kin we do?" he demanded.

The boys were not quick to reply, and Dave added:

"Ain't there winders ter the boat?"

Flip rushed into one of the state-rooms. He soon emerged.

"Nailed up!" was his comment.

The search once started he and Shoestrings made diligent search, but the only result was that the fact was emphasized that they were securely imprisoned. Every avenue known to them was made fast, and they were unable to stir from the place assigned to them.

"The boat rocks a good deal," remarked Dave, presently.

"We hev drifted out o' the dock ter the river," replied Flip.

"An' what then?"

"Then we'll keep on driftin' until we go down in fifty feet o' water. When we do that, we are drowned, sure."

The ship gave a heavy lurch.

"She ain't goin' ter keep up long," added Shoestrings. "She wouldn't do that ef she wasn't gittin' ready ter sink."

The doomed party collected around the cabin table. The light burned fitfully now, but it was enough to show that all felt the danger. They were not in love with the prospect of death, and death seemed sure.

"Oh! that we was on the plains now!" muttered Dave. "I'd soon find a way out, but this durned ship—I don't know nothin' about it."

His gaze turned upon Nell. Sight of her stung him to fury.

"Drowned!" he shouted, in a voice like a tempest. "Never! My gal ain't goin' ter lose her life so. Drowned! Why, I'll git out o' this ark ef I tear my way out with my teeth. Ho! to escape!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE RANCHMAN'S AX.

DAVE STARLING had turned into a sort of human tiger. Unaccustomed to water life, he had been dulled by the situation, but as he thought more fully of his daughter, he changed wonderfully. His eyes gleamed remarkably and his big frame seemed to grow larger. He swung his long arms in mid-air.

"Give me somethin' ter work with!" he cried, "an' I'll cut my way through the very heart of this blamed old ark!"

"Look fer an ax," suggested Shoestrings.

"They wouldn't leave any—"

"Look, look!" thundered Dave.

All ran about, but for a time it seemed as if Flip's prophecy was well founded—there was not a thing visible with which an attack on the barrier could be made, it seemed.

Then a cry rose from Shoestrings.

"An ax, an ax!"

He came hurrying from a remote corner with the tool in his hand.

"It was under a pile o' boards—"

"Give it here!"

Big Dave snatched the ax and ran to one of the cabins. He knew a window was there back of the boards recently nailed up, and he knew there was some hope of forcing a way through the obstacle.

He swung the ax and the blade was buried in the wood. Up went the tool again, but Dave missed his aim as a heavy lurch of the ship nearly took him off his feet.

"We're sinkin'!" exclaimed Shoestrings.

It did seem that the vessel had stood up as long as it could, but it gradually recovered a little and rolled on without the dreaded descent to the watery depths.

Starling lost no time, and his ax began to ply again. He was the one hope of the imperiled party, and he was doing his part well. The ax never wavered, and Dave was like a giant as he wielded it. His muscles stood out like ropes, and his face was terrible in its intensity. So might a barbarian have looked in olden days.

Crash!

The ax went through the boards and the glass was shattered beyond.

"Whoop!" yelled Flip. "We will git in-ter it, after all. Go it, Nebraska! Make the chips fly!"

"A few more will fetch it!" added Shoestrings, encouragingly.

Not a word spoke Dave, but the power with which he drove the ax was wonderful. Blow after blow he rained, and then a cheer sounded from the boys as a great hole appeared.

Starling dropped the ax, seized at the remaining parts of the boards with his bare hands and tore at them wolfishly.

"Whoop!"

Flip yelled again as the last portions of the boards were torn away. The opening was ready for them, but the ship was pitching dangerously, and it was plain she could not long stand. They could see, too, that they were well out in the river, and it would be sure death to sink with the vessel there.

"Kin you swim, mister?" asked Flip.

"Yes."

"So can I," added Nell.

"Hooray!" exclaimed Flip. "That makes things kinder favorable. I s'pose we are almost sure ter be drowned, but it gives us one chance in a dozen, anyhow."

"The ship totters dangerously," reminded Starling. "Boys, can you give any plans?"

"Nothin' but ter drop inter the drink an' then drop out again."

"An' we want ter do it mighty quick!" declared Shoestrings. "See how she pitches! Oh! will you hustle!—we are goin' down, sure!"

"Out o' the winder!" added Flip, excitedly.

"I will go first so as ter receive my gal," pursued Dave.

He tried it, and though he found the aperture too small for comfort, succeeded in wriggling through. Then he clung skillfully on the outside and assisted Nell, who showed true Western pluck and followed quickly and skillfully.

As soon as Starling grasped her he released his hold and the way was open for the boys.

"Go, Shoestrings," directed Flip.

"No, I'll go last—"

"Go, you rascal!"

Flip did not intend to leave a younger companion to take the final risks, and he pushed Shoestrings forward until the latter had to hustle or be literally dropped in the drink.

"Crickey! I've got jest three-quarters of a second ter foller!"

This decision was brought forth by the tottering of the craft, and the alert adventurer did not follow the lead of his opinions. He wormed quickly into the space and moved his head into the outer world. Just then the vessel righted itself for a moment, and he paused to look around.

They had floated well away from the New York shore, and were plunging about in deep water. The night was dark and no other craft, big or little, was within the range of Flip's vision. They were in the part of the river where, to those situated, the stream looked not unlike a wide ocean.

"Hurry up, Flip!" urged Shoestrings. "You'll go down with her!"

As if to prove the prediction the ship made a lurch and dipped her bows to such an extent that Flip was nearly submerged. He needed nothing more in the way of a reminder—he released his hold and took to the river.

His predecessors had gathered their wits and were keeping up systematically. Starling, holding his daughter, but not incumbered by her, for she was as good a swimmer as himself, cried out:

"Which way?"

"Lead off, Shoestrings!" directed Flip.

The younger boy pointed his nose toward the New York line of piers and began to swim stoutly. Dave followed, but Flip lingered to look at the vessel. He believed her minutes were numbered, and he wanted to see the end.

It came quickly. She appeared to have a convulsion, and trembled from end to end; then she suddenly dipped her bows and went down with a gurgle and a displacement of the water which made the river boil even where the observer was.

"Gone!" murmured Flip.

It was true. The wreck had taken its last plunge and disappeared under the surface.

"Crickey! ef we hadn't got out as we did we should hev been drownin' jest about now!"

It was not a pleasant thought, and Flip willingly turned and followed his friends.

Rough as the water was it did not prove any impediment to such skillful swimmers, and all finally landed on one of the piers. They had seen the prudence of going ashore well away from where their foes had left them, though it was safe to infer that none of the latter had lingered around the place after once shutting them in.

Dave Starling, once more turned from a lion into a father, was exulting over the rescue of his daughter, but the dripping boys had something else to think of.

"Say, that gang is too measly mean ter live!" declared Shoestrings, stirred out of his usual meekness.

"They're too mean ter die," amended Flip. "W'ot they need is a few years in Sing Sing ter cool their heels, an' they will jest about git it, or I'm no peach. From this time on we are enter their trail like shootin' stars."

"I thought you was gone up when I missed you in the cabin."

"Aw! the big stuffs pounced on me, shut off my speech an' tied me up an' chucked me inter a cabin with a bandage on my mouth. Yell? Why I couldn't even sing Yankee Doodle."

The ranchman approached.

"Boys," he spoke, "you hev done us a pile o' good ter-night, an' I hope ter reward ye fer it—"

"Hold hard, Nebraska," interrupted Flip. "Let us down this gang, an' then we will hev our little jubilee. How did they happen ter nab you an' yer daughter, individually an' collective?"

"They first seized her as she was going about the city, homeless an' friendless, an' then lured me here too. Of course it would hev been rash ter bring us tergether ef it hadn't been for their plan; but they thought that plan was goin' ter drown'd us both. But how did you get into it?"

Flip's face expanded in a broad smile.

"All on account of our habit o' lookin' inter things."

"How is that?"

"We are investigators an' peramberlaters, ye see. In plain words, we got inter this scrape by comin' close ter meddlin' with things we knowed not of, as the poick says."

"We are all safe, but what be we ter do now?"

"Git under the umbrella before Black Beard sets his heavy hoof upon ye again."

"We don't care ter flee—"

"You'd better not fight."

"I mean, there are things we want ter do before we leave the city—"

"I should say so!" cried Flip, with energy. "There is a good bit you want ter do, an' ditto with me an' Shoestrings. Hey, Shoestrings?—Crickey! we'll all git a move on an' make them crooks take ter their holes. Come on an' do it!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STOLEN BOX.

It was nine o'clock of the next evening. Down on one of the cross streets of the East Side region, Flip and Shoestrings stood together. Their manner was not as open and frank as was their custom, and they seemed to have something on their minds. This was correct, and the load was a heavy one, being no less than a ponderous building not far away.

A sign over the door of this structure told that it was a factory; but it had closed with the end of day, and there was now no more than a long, dark line of brick and glass.

One would have said there was nothing about the building to invite anybody's interest; but this was not the case with the boys.

They watched the place closely, and they did more—they watched the street on both sides of them.

"I don't see nothin'," finally grumbled Shoestrings, breaking a long silence.

"Now, don't get gay, my frien'," directed Flip. "You don't expect them ter come an' jump right inter our arms like a fish, do ye?"

"Ef I do, they don't come."

"Certain they don't, young feller. Ef they did you would be so lucky that theater fellers would want ter wear ye on their watch-chains fer a charm."

"But they may not come at all."

"So we may miss our breakfast; but we hope ter git it. Keep yer nose up. Shoestrings—don't git in the doldrums. Ef you should git all the luck you wouldn't—"

"Hey, Flip, git under cover!"

Shoestrings seized his ally and pulled him back, and then both sunk into a deep doorway.

"W'ot did you spot?" whispered Flip.

"The men comin' down the street, an' I believe one o' them is the man with the black beard."

"Oh! Addison, my gay laddie, be you really on the pave?" murmured the older boy. "I'll take a peek. Hold onter my necktie, Shoestrings, so I won't git giddy."

Flip took the secret view, and then drew back.

"That's Oates," he declared, "an' he has Dick with him. Et is workin' jest as we planned."

The two men he had named tramped down the street. Near one of the smaller doors of the factory they paused for a moment, and then Dick knocked on the panel in a peculiar way. The door opened; they entered; the door closed.

"Crickey! ain't that great?" cried Shoestrings.

"The circus begins. Stay here, my friend, until I slide down the street an' notify the cops that the game is inter it."

"Hustle!"

"See me sail!"

Flip dashed away, and Shoestrings waited impatiently. Flip was as expeditious as could be expected, and he was soon back again.

"All serene," he remarked. "Now fer the next step. Come along!"

"Was the police kinder civil?"

"They was simply glorious. Why shouldn't they be? It was you an' me who got onter their jinks, an' we did it by brain-thinks. When we found that Dick had a brother who was night-watchman here, an' nobody could locate our game, we argued that mebbe Dick had found an asylum fer them here, didn't we? An' don't et look like it?"

"Yes."

"Then, how kin the police fail ter do us justice? The police is bully boys, now I tell you! Here's the key the owner o' the factory give me—in we go!"

Flip unlocked another side-door, and they passed through. There was nothing but darkness beyond, but they had been over the ground during the day and they knew the way. They crept up-stairs in the inky gloom.

"Hey, Shoestrings! there's our game!"

"Addison Oates an' Dick's brother. Where's Dick?"

"I guess—"

Flip stopped short as a door opposite to them swung open, revealing a flight of stairs beyond. From this place came Moon Martin, Tim Flynn and Violet.

Flip pinched his ally severely.

"Hold onter my necktie or I'll jump," he cautioned. "All goes glorious, my boy."

They hev been hid in the loft, jest as we figgered out."

"Lay low."

"So we will, an' we'll keep it up until the police come."

The spies settled down to watch and listen. Addison Oates looked around on the party.

"We are all here," he remarked, "and when I say that, I may add that we are lucky not to be at Police Headquarters. We have run dangerously close to the frying-pan of late, but if all goes well we will get out of New York to night and be seen here no more until this squall has blown over."

"There is nobody ter stop us," replied Moon Martin. "Like the South Sea cannibal we hev eaten all of our enemies."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Oates. "I see that the evening papers say that the old ship that lay in a certain dock broke loose last night, floated away and is supposed to have sunk in the river or the harbor."

"That's true," added Moon.

"She had help to break loose."

"So she did."

"And all of our foes went down with her," pursued Oates, calmly. "Dave Starling and his daughter will bother us no more."

"Nor the two kids."

"My office boy turned out badly," admitted Addison, shaking his head. "His death saved him from worse, though. I think it was clever of me to engage him as a victim to my land investment scheme. Ha, ha!—he was very much pleased when I took him as office boy—and he an uncouth East-Sider—but he little knew it was all to mix him up in the land scheme, and then get the blame for my misdeeds onto him. Well, he's gone home, and the land scheme will lie over until this Starling affair is sure to have blown over."

"We need not worry about them now. Still, we hev ourselves to look out fer, an' we want ter git out o' New York early. Shall we proceed ter biz?"

"At once," answered Oates. "Bring down the box!"

Dick went up the stairs to the loft, but shortly returned with a box under his arm. Flip nudged Shoestrings.

"Say, kid," he whispered, "we're right inter this game."

The box was set down, and then Oates took a hammer and chisel which had been brought forward by his allies.

"This is an eventful moment for me," he declared. "In a few minutes I shall have in my hands things which will, indirectly, net me a cool hundred thousand dollars. You are not in the play, but you need not fear being left. I will pay you all for your devotion to my interests. I am an honest man."

"Ef we did swipe the box," added Moon, with a grin.

"Ha, ha! Just so. It was a neat job when we stole this from old Peter Mainford. On the whole, I am glad our plan to burn his house down did not succeed, for he might have perished in it. We got away with the box neatly, and now we will reap the reward. It has annoyed me to defer opening it so long, but I thought it best not to come here too soon, and the treasures would keep."

"It was safe here all the while."

"Of course."

"I feel a bit sorry for Nell Starling," admitted Violet. "How she clung to the box as long as she could. It was dire necessity that made her leave it with old Mainford, and then it was rank luck when she failed to remember where she left it."

"She should have taken down the street and number."

"I have been very conspicuous in this, and I am sorry now. At your bidding, Addison, I went to the Nebraska ranch and lured her away, and now she is—"

"Never mind; never mind!" hurriedly

exclaimed Oates. "Let us do this work. Now to force the box."

Oates bent down and inserted the edge of the chisel under the cover. Then he began to tap upon the implement with the hammer. His companions gathered around him, and not the least interested persons were Flip and Shoestrings. They believed that an unpleasant surprise awaited the thieves.

Addison struck several blows and then suddenly rose.

"I am nervous; my hand trembles too much for this job," he declared. "Moon, do it for me. I seem to see the fortune I hope to reap for this."

"You will soon be rich," murmured Violet.

"I shall, I hope, soon be reconciled to my relatives. They cast me off because I was a black sheep, but they were no better. A blight on their false pride! It was that which made them cast off Nell Starling's mother. She should have been rich, but just because she married Dave Starling—a common man—they cast her off."

"But she took this box."

"Yes, they could not prevent that. It was hers, and so were the things in it. But they have always coveted the things therein, not because of their money value, for that was not over a thousand dollars; but because they were heirlooms; and dear to their proud hearts. They were— Ha! have you got it, Moon?"

"Look for yourself!"

Moon threw back the cover.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RESULTS OF THE ROBBERY.

ADDISON OATES seemed to lose command of himself.

"Hurrah!" he almost shouted; "the waiting is over. Now for the booty!"

He sprang forward, seized upon a cloth which covered the contents of the box and cast it aside. His hand was raised as if to grasp something more, but the hand was arrested in mid-air. He became like a statue, his dilated eyes directed toward the interior of the box.

Again Flip nudged Shoestrings.

Oates's hand fell and his face grew pallid.

"What?" he gasped.

"Eh?" returned Moon.

"This—this—this—"

Addison stammered huskily and then ceased to speak.

"Be them the things you wanted?" inquired Moon, doubtfully.

Oates leaped to his feet.

"Ruin, ruin!" he panted. "I have been deceived; I have been—"

Fury came to his face, and he sprang forward and laid hold of Dick.

"You have meddled with this box!" he shouted. "You have robbed me! There has been foul play here!"

"You saw for yourself that the box had not been tampered with," reminded Violet, practically.

Oates relaxed his hold and fell back.

"True, true!" he admitted, brokenly; "the mischief was not done here. It was done before the box left Mainford's— Ha! I have it! We have made an awful mistake; we took the wrong box from Mainford's house!"

A broad smile overspread Flip's face, but the conspirators did not feel in a like mood. Oates was simply overwhelmed, and his dismay was reflected on the countenance of his tools.

There was a considerable pause, and then Moon Martin found his voice.

"How could that be?" he demanded.

"I don't know. I only know we have made a mistake. Look at the contents of that box! The Evil One only knows what

rubbish it is, but there are wires and jim-cracks curled and bent in every which-way. It looks as if a madman had been let loose."

"It isn't old lace an' silverware an' silks an' medals, sech as you looked fer—"

"I should say not."

"Durned ef I know w'ot et is."

"I remember now that we were told Mainford was an inventor. That makes it plain; this wild looking thing is a model of something, though nobody outside of an insane asylum could tell what. Perdition take the luck! I am ruined!"

Oates began to pace back and forth excitedly.

"Hard luck!" agreed Moon.

"It ruins me," persisted Addison. "I depended upon restoring this trash to my relatives who had cast me off as a black sheep. The last chance is gone. I shall have to give up getting back into good society and riches, and remain a black sheep and a shy-ster. It won't be in New York. We have stirred up a pretty hornets' nest here, and though I would remain and fight it out if there was money in it, I can't do it when there is nothing. I will skip the city."

Oates was badly unnerved, but he had the sympathy of his companions. All but Dick kept their gaze commiseratingly on his face. Dick used his eyes more practically.

Perhaps the watching boys by the door were rash about exposing themselves; be that as it may, they were soon shown that Dick had not been blind.

One moment there was not a visible sign of danger to them; the next, Dick made a wild rush and was beside them before they could retreat successfully. When they did go they unfortunately bumped together, and the collision sent Flip to the floor, while Shoestrings went tumbling down the stairs with many a thump and rattle.

Flip was up quickly, but Dick's hand was on him.

"A spy!" shouted the man.

Then his allies saw him returning with somebody in his hold who writhed and twisted like a snake. Flip was making a game struggle, but he lacked the strength to beat off his captor. He was hauled close to his enemies and then flung forward into the group.

"A spy!" repeated Dick.

They looked hard, and then Addison Oates grew bewildered.

"What!" he cried. "My office-boy!"

"So it is."

"B-b-but he is dead!" gasped Moon.

"Beaten in this game as well as the other!" exclaimed Oates, who had no superstition. "How he escaped from the vessel I don't know, but here he is."

"Yes, an' he kin ruin us," reminded Dick.

"He knows that we scuttled the ship."

Moon Martin rallied.

"Then let him die!" he cried. "It is his life or ours. Be we goin' ter let him do us up? No!"

"How can we prevent it?" demanded Oates.

"Silence him!" hissed Moon. "The boy must die, I say!"

"Now, you jest hold yer cable-car," requested Flip, with remarkable nerve. "I ain't the measly Harlem goat you take me ter be. I'm employed by your house, an' I wouldn't go back on ye fer a cent—no, I wouldn't, by gum!"

"You protest in vain. Moon, I reckon your way is right."

"Rush him up to the loft and silence him."

"Away with him!" ordered Oates.

Moon and Dick seized upon the boy, and then ensued a lively time. Flip was really frightened, at last, and he fought like a young tiger. His hands and legs were busy, and many a hard thump he gave his foes, but it was clear that he could not hold his own. Black Tim finally came into the game,

and, with the addition of his strength, the luckless captive was secured.

They started up the stairs with him.

"Oh! Ad Oates, won't I make it merry for you ef you do me up!" cried Flip. "I'll turn inter a ghost an' do the skirt-dance on yer stomach every blessed night."

"Up with him!" added the arch-plotter. "Hold!"

It was a new voice, sharp and commanding, and as the schemers turned toward the door which led to the lower stairs they had a disagreeable surprise. A line of policemen was marching into the room, and in numbers which settled all question of resistance. In fact, it seemed as if the earth was vomiting blue-coats.

"Lost!" muttered Oates.

Moon and Dick were so dumfounded that they forgot to hold fast, and Flip wriggled skillfully out of their grasp.

"This way, captain!" he cried. "I've got them all rounded up fer you. It was all settled before you come, only I didn't put irons onter them. They forgot ter surrender ter me officially, but they are yer meat jest the same. Gobble them, boss!"

"You are all prisoners!" declared the police leader.

"Yes, I ketched them," agreed Flip, modestly.

Oates suddenly moved forward and held out his hands.

"Here are my wrists," he added. "I have run my race, and now you can do with me as you please. It is a bitter pill, but I have one consolation—I will make my real name known, and I shall have the pleasure of disgracing the rich relatives who cast me off as a black sheep!"

"Iron his wrists, men," commanded the officer.

"All I ask," added Addison, coolly, "is that you will let me stop on the way and buy a few cigars."

"Zounds! he's a cool one," muttered one of the policemen.

"Yes, he's sorter cool," admitted Flip. "but he didn't git the bulge onter me! I pulled the whole gang, in spite o' their nerve. Hullo, is that you, Shoestrings? Et d'dnt kill you, I see, ter fall down the stair. But, why should et? Gents, here is a kid that is jest a peach at this biz. He helped me all the way through, an' now him an' I hev the honor ter hand over our prisoners. The race is run. Waltz off the thugs an' toughs! Then I'll take you all out ter hev supper with me. It's my treat, an' I am the lad that kin entertain as wal as any Fifth Avenoo gent. Ring down the curtain!"

The victory was complete, and the next acts in the drama followed in due time. Oates, Moon Martin, Dick, Tim and Violet were put on trial, convicted and sent to prison. They went with the knowledge that they had been worsted by a couple of boys, and it was a bitter dose to swallow.

Dave Starling and Nell went back to Nebraska, happy and triumphant, and giving due credit to Flip and Shoestrings.

Peter Mainford's beloved patent was restored to him intact and undamaged, and he expects soon to light the streets of New York as they never have been lighted before.

Flip has gone into partnership with Shoestrings as a peddler of laces, but they are planning for bigger fields of business, and it may well be believed they will succeed where they try.

THE END.

NEXT HALF-DIME LIBRARY, No. 916.

GLORIOUS DEADWOOD DICK, Jr.!

Plays a Raking Hand!

The Daring Detective's Double-up on the High Horse of Roaring River Camp—the Mine-owner with a mighty bad record, is the key-note of this stunner story; and a strange adjunct of

A Shadow Coffin In the Air!

a mystery, incomprehensible, even to Dick, adds a weird feature to the remarkable narrative and drama.

No recent issue of any LIBRARY romance can compare, in novel conditions, startling situations, and variety of strong characters involved with

Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Double-Decker;

OR,

Center-Fire, the Self-Cocker.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER.

Don't miss the great literary treat. Line right up to the bar of your News-agent and call for it—

Next Week! Number 916!

Beadle's Half-Dime Library.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER.

Deadwood Dick Novels.

- 448 Deadwood Dick, Jr., or, The Crimson Crescent Sign.
- 448 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Defiance.
- 458 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Full Hand.
- 459 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Big Round Up.
- 465 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Racket at Chalm 10.
- 471 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Corral; or, Bonanza Bill.
- 476 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dog Detective.
- 481 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Deadwood.
- 491 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Compact.
- 496 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Inheritance.
- 500 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Diggings.
- 508 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Deliverance.
- 515 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Protegee.
- 522 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Three.
- 529 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Danger Ducks.
- 534 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Death Hunt.
- 542 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Texas.
- 544 Deadwood Dick, Jr., the Wild West Vindicator.
- 549 Deadwood Dick, Jr., on His Kettle.
- 554 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Gotham.
- 561 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Boston.
- 567 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Philadelphia.
- 572 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Chicago.
- 578 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Afloat.
- 584 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Denver.
- 590 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Decree.
- 595 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Beelzebub's Basin.
- 600 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Coney Island.
- 606 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Lendville Lay.
- 612 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Detroit.
- 618 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Cincinnati.
- 624 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Nevada.
- 630 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in No Man's Land.
- 636 Deadwood Dick, Jr., After the Queer.
- 642 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Buffalo.
- 648 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Chase Across the Continent.
- 654 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Among the Smugglers.
- 660 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Insurance Case.
- 666 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Back in the Mines.
- 672 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Durango; or, "Gathered In."
- 678 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Discovery; or, Found a Fortune.
- 684 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dazzle.
- 690 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dollars.
- 695 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Danger Divide.
- 700 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Drop.
- 704 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Jack-Pot.
- 710 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in San Francisco.
- 716 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Still Hunt.
- 722 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dominoes.
- 728 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Disguise.
- 734 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Double Deal.
- 740 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Deathwatch.
- 747 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Doublet.
- 752 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Deathblow.
- 758 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Desperate Strait.
- 764 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Lone Hand.
- 770 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Defeat.
- 776 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Resurrection.
- 782 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dark Days.
- 787 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Defied.
- 793 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Double Deceit.
- 797 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Desperate Venture.
- 803 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Diamond Dice.
- 807 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Royal Flush.
- 812 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Head-off.
- 816 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Rival.
- 822 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Boom.
- 828 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Scoop.
- 834 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Proxy.
- 840 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Clutch.
- 845 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, High Horse.
- 852 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Devil's Gulch.
- 858 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Death-Hole Hustler.
- 863 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Bombshell.
- 870 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Mexico.
- 876 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Decey Duck.
- 882 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Silver Pocket.
- 891 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dead-Sure Game.
- 898 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Double Drive.
- 904 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Trade-Mark.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS

- 908 New York Nat's Double.
- 902 New York Nat's in Colorado.
- 896 New York Nat in Gold Nugget.
- 889 New York Nat's Deadly Deed.
- 888 New York Nat's Crook-Chase.
- 877 New York Nat's Trump Card.
- 871 New York Nat and the Gam.
- 865 New York Nat's Masked Men.
- 859 New York Nat, the Gamble Detective.
- 853 Dick Doom's Kidnapper Kne.
- 847 Dick Doom's Ten Strike.
- 842 Dick Doom's Flush Hand.
- 772 Dick Doom's Death-Grip; or,
- 777 Dick Doom's Destiny; or, The
- 784 Dick Doom; or, The Sharps and S.
- 788 Dick Doom in Boston; or, A M
- 793 Dick Doom in Chicago.
- 798 Dick Doom in the Wild West.
- 803 Dick Doom's Clean Sweep; or,
- 808 Dick Doom's Death Clue.
- 813 Dick Doom's Diamond Deal.
- 819 Dick Doom's Girl Mascot.
- 829 Dick Doom's Shadow Hunt.
- 835 Dick Doom's Big Hunt.
- 749 Dashing Charlie; or, The Kentur
- 756 Dashing Charlie's Destiny; or,
- 760 Dashing Charlie's Pawnee I
- 766 Dashing Charlie, the Rescuer.
- 497 Buck Taylor, King of the Cowbo
- 737 Buck Taylor, the Comanche's C
- 743 Buck Taylor's Boy; or, The Ra
- 560 Pawnee Bill, the Prairie Shadow
- 718 Pawnee Bill; or, Carl, the Mad C
- 719 Pawnee Bill's Pledge; or, The
- 725 Pawnee Bill; or, Darling Dick.
- 692 Redfern's Curious Case; or, T
- 691 Redfern at Devil's Ranch; or,
- 702 Redfern's High Hand; or, Bu
- 707 Redfern's Last Trail; or, The
- 668 Red Ralph's Ruse; or, The Buc
- 674 Red Ralph's Bold Game; or, Th
- 679 Red Ralph, the Shadow; or, Th
- 644 Butterfly Billy's Disguise.
- 650 Butterfly Billy, the Pony Expr
- 656 Butterfly Billy's Man Hunt.
- 662 Butterfly Billy's Bonanza.
- 565 Kent Kingdon; or, The Owl's of
- 570 Kent Kingdon's Shadow; or,
- 575 Kent Kingdon's Duel; or, The
- 586 Kent Kingdon's Doom; or, TI
- 545 Laftie Run Down; or, The Bu
- 550 Laftie's Legacy; or, The Aveng
- 555 Laftie's Confession; or, The C
- And Fifty Other

BY JO PIERCE

- 597 Bob o' the Bowery; or, The Pri
- 415 The Vagabond Detective; or, I
- 452 Hotspur Bob, the Street-Boy Det
- 460 The Lawyer's Shadow; or, Lu
- 473 Jaunty Joe, the Young Horse-Kin
- 494 Surly Sam, the Young Ferryman D
- 504 Five Points Phil, the Pavement
- 509 Jack Jiggers, the Butcher Boy D
- 516 Tartar Tim; or, Five Points Phil's
- 526 North River Nat, the Pier Detect
- 538 Wrestling Rex, the Pride of the S
- 541 Jeff Fflicker, the Stable-Boy Detect
- 551 Nick Nettle, the Boy Shadow; or,
- 559 Harlem Jack, the Office Boy Det
- 569 Brooklyn Ben, the On His Own
- 577 Pavement Pete, the Secret Sifter
- 588 Jack-o'-Lantern, the Under-Sea I
- 608 Wide-Awake Bert, the Street-St
- 614 Whistling Jacob, the Detective's
- 625 Buck Bumblebee, the Harlem H
- 639 Sunrize Saul, the Express-Train F
- 649 Sammie Bob, the Bowery Badger; or,
- 658 Sky-Rocket Rob, the Life-Saver.
- 668 Salt-peter Sol, the New York Nat
- 694 Spicy Jim, the Only One of His I
- 706 Tom Thistle, the Road-House Det
- 717 Mosquito Jack, the Hustler Sam
- 726 Dennis Buff, the Brown Sport's K
- 744 Dick of the Docks, the Night-W
- 765 Flipper Flynn, the Street Patrol.
- 771 Foxy Fred's Odd Pardi; or, The nee
- 781 Cast-Off Cole, the Scapegoat Detect
- 824 Bowery Billy, the Bunco Bouncer.
- 837 The Big Four of the Bowery.
- 846 Buck, the New York Sharper.
- 850 The Grand Street Arab.
- 855 The West Broadway Gam.
- 860 The Boat-Club Mascot; or, Dan Dec
- 864 The Union Square Baggage Boy.
- 878 The Street Arab's Blind.
- 886 The Five Points Lodging House J
- 890 Ace High, the Trump Card Detective.
- 895 Fifth Avenue Fred, the Valet Detect
- 899 Basement Bert, the Boy Cobbler Det
- 908 Billy Blue-Blazes, the Dodger of the D
- 907 Reddy Rusher, Bell-Boy 4-11-44.

BY BUFFALO BILL (Hon. Wm.)

- 3 Kansas King; or, The Red Right Hand.
- 19 The Phantom Spy; or, The Pilot of the
- 55 Deadly-Eye, the Unknown Scout; or, The
- 68 Border Robin Hood; or, The Prairie R
- 158 Fancy Frank of Colorado; or, The T

LATEST AND NEW IS

- 909 Midshipman Dare, the Pirate C
- Sen Rovers of '98. By T. J. Flanagan.
- 910 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Tip-Top!
- Bullet-proof sport. By Edward L. Wheeler.
- 911 Bowery Bob, the East-side Detect
- the Shady Sharper. By Harold Payne.
- 912 Train Boy Trist's Hot Hustler
- Broadway Crook. By J. C. Cowdrick.
- 918 Kit Keith, the Revenue Spotter; or, Th
- Run. By Ed. L. Wheeler.
- 914 New York Nat's Three of a Kind;
- Close Call. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.
- 915 Flip Flasher, Ferret, of East Bron
- the Fire-bugs. By Jo Pierce.
- 916 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Double Dec
- Fire, the Self-Cocker. By Edward L. Wheeler.
- 917 Flash Lightning, the Mountain Mascot;
- Doom. By Charles Morris.

A New Issue Every Tuesday.

The Half-Dime Library is for sale by all newsdealers, cents per copy, or sent by mail on receipt of six cents each.

BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,

98 William Street, New York